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**"BOYS, SWIM FOR YOUR LIVES." — Page 234.**

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MARY A. M. DOWLING.



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AMANDA M. DOUGLAS,

AUTHOR OF "KATHIE'S THREE WISHES," "KATHIE'S AUNT RUTH," "KATHIE'S  
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“A faithful friend is the medicine of life; and they that fear the Lord shall find him.”

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# IN THE RANKS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE CLOUD IN A MAY SKY.

KATHIE ALSTON stood by the open window one May morning drawing in long breaths of sweet, dewy air, fragrant with pine and cedar and the young grasses that were drying their still moist blades in the shining sun. How beautiful the picture was that spread itself out before her! Another long, lovely summer. It seemed only like a little dream since last May. There had been the gardening with Uncle Robert and Mr. Morrison, the drives and walks, the delightful tour down the river, the pleasant visits of friends, and many, many joys. Could any summer ever be quite so happy again?

"What makes my little girl so grave?" asked the well-known kindly voice.

"O Uncle Robert! Was I grave? I am sure I felt very happy. I was only thinking."

He smiled a little as he took her hand.

"Thinking of all the sweet and wonderful things that have happened since you came home," she went on, in a low tone, "and almost asking myself if any were left for this summer. But there will always be flowers and sunshine, and something to do for ourselves and others, I suppose. Only I am curious to know what it *can* be."

"Then you do not begin to fancy that your work is all done?" and an odd smile hovered about Uncle Robert's face.

"I think it can hardly be," and she smiled with a puzzled expression. "I don't mean lessons and music practices, but it seems as if all the people who used to need me had found some other help. Aunt Ruth is so well, and Jane does all the little errands for mamma that I used to do, and Mr. Meredith has almost recovered, — besides he has dear Jessie, — and Ethel's papa has come home. Everything happened just right, — did it not?"

"God seemed to be keeping watch over us in a peculiar manner through the winter. Our spring

might have been very different, even though birds sang and flowers bloomed."

There was a little thrill of thankfulness in Kathie's heart. She was learning what was meant by the scriptural injunction, "In everything give thanks." Not to save all her mercies and pleasures to hurry over in a brief prayer at bedtime, but to think of them as they came, hour by hour. Neither did the old ones slip out of her mind. And this morning it seemed such a dear and infinite blessing that Mr. Morrison had not been called upon to die in her uncle's stead, and that Mr. Meredith was almost his olden self again. No evil had happened to them or theirs, though many a home in the land had been filled with mourning.

Then her thoughts veered round a little, as if blown about by the fresh south-wind.

"In another month Rob will be home," she said. "I shall be so glad to see him. I wonder if it will all seem natural to him."

"I am quite anxious to see him myself. Indeed, I have been thinking of taking a little journey to Clifton Hall. Why, we have not had our



usual letter this week! He could not have written on Monday, even. But he has been such a regular correspondent that we must not be too exacting."

Uncle Robert required of his nephew that he should write home once a week, even if the letter only contained three lines. "Then we shall have no anxiety about you," he said, "and you can surely find fifteen minutes or more to devote to us once in seven days."

In the main Rob had done pretty well. Sometimes, it is true, his epistles were models of brevity, but school-boys generally have their hands full.

Kathie and Uncle Robert went in-doors at the sound of the breakfast-bell. Freddy was there, as bright as a new pink; and tidy Jane Maybin, with her apron snowy white, came in to wait upon the table. Kathie smiled inwardly, remembering her friend Ada's strictures upon style and fashion.

"This surely would suit her," she thought.

"We have not heard from Robert this week," exclaimed Mrs. Alston, after the coffee had been poured.

"Kathie and I were just talking about it."

"It is very strange. You do not think he can be sick?"

"O no, it is only a boyish freak of delay. Boys always have so much on hand, you know."

"And I have a great horror of children being sick at boarding-school."

"Do not alarm yourself needlessly, Dora"; and Uncle Robert smiled cheerfully.

Seeing that, Kathie's fears melted into thin air, and were lost amid a dozen glad childish thoughts.

"I had half resolved to take a trip to Clifton Hall," he announced presently.

"I wish you would," returned Mrs. Alston.

Kathie gathered a choice bouquet and started for school. Mrs. Alston and Aunt Ruth busied themselves about household affairs, and Uncle Robert went over to the village. The mail came in at twelve, so he waited awhile. No letter from the boy. But what was this directed in a stiff, plain hand, with a Westbury postmark?

He opened it with a little fear, it must be confessed. Not the much-dreaded illness, however, but a rather startling announcement. The few prefatory remarks were of no import, but these lines filled him with pain and surprise:—

"Your nephew, I grieve to say, has been implicated in so grave a misdemeanor that expulsion is hardly severe enough punishment. It will end in this; but I wish very much to see you, as my efforts to bring him to any degree of penitence or confession have been utterly unavailing. It seems that he holds the whole secret, but he refuses to name any of his accomplices. Thinking that you, perhaps, might have more authority or power, I request the favor of your presence at your very earliest convenience."

It was a sudden and painful shock. They had all thought Rob going on so nicely. To be expelled from school in his first year would be a deep disgrace. His uncle could only think of some terrible altercation, in which Rob's hot temper had led him to give an unfortunate blow, that might be followed by serious consequences.

He debated awhile whether he should inform the family. In that event they would be prepared for the worst; but, on the other hand, it might be possible to lead the boy to penitence and a better mind, and perhaps he might induce Dr. Goldthwaite to retain him until the close of the term.

He finally decided upon a middle course. When he reached home, he simply said to Mrs. Alston, "Dora, I have had a note from Dr. Goldthwaite, and there has been some trouble in the school. I suppose this is why Rob has not written. The doctor wishes to see me, and I shall start for Westbury this afternoon."

"O Robert! what is it? I was almost sure —"

"He did not explain. Some boyish frolic, I dare say. You will see me back in a day or two, and know all."

She had it in her heart to wish that she had never consented to Rob's going away from home. But some time he would have to try the world without a mother's watchful eyes, and it appeared unkind to blame this most generous brother.

"Do not fret about it," he said, cheerily. "It may be better for Robert to suffer now for thoughtless and foolish deeds, than to bear a heavier burden hereafter."

Kathie only knew that Uncle Robert had gone to Westbury. She devoted most of the afternoon to a little gem of Beethoven's that she knew he admired, and then helped Freddy with his garden-

plot,—in which, as usual, he was to raise unheard-of wonders, and Hannah was to buy all the vegetables.

Uncle Robert, in the mean while, pursued his journey in a thoughtful state of mind. He was a good deal disappointed, for, when Rob's first months had passed so creditably, he had, in a measure, ceased to be particularly anxious about him. Now he asked himself if, amid all the rush of incidents during the winter, he had failed in any duty, let the boy slip too far out of his mind, or trusted him too much alone. He had promised to be a father to these fatherless children, and they needed love and watchfulness as well as what his money could give them.

It was evening when he arrived at Clifton Hall. He had not stopped for supper; for he would have been unable to swallow a mouthful. The nearer he came the more active grew his fears. There were a few loungers in the spacious hall, but the servant ushered him at once into the Doctor's room. Many a poor culprit had gone thither trembling and shaking, and not a few in the spirit of daring bravado. The furniture was plain,

covered with russet leather, the floor oaken, and the great desk had a stern, uncommunicative look. The walls, to be sure, were decorated with some odd and quaint ornaments, most of them gifts from friends and pupils.

Dr. Goldthwaite entered in a few moments. He was rather stiff and formal, and looked every inch a pedagogue. But one caught a little twinkle and softness in his gray eye now and then, and more than one man of the world had made a pilgrimage back to this little den of the Doctor for the sake of love and memory. The years that had frosted his hair and wrinkled his face had not withered the stern but kindly heart.

"Mr. Conover! I am glad to see you, sir."

The two grasped hands as people always do when a touch of sorrow or pain is hidden in the clasp.

"I came immediately. I cannot tell you how your tidings pained me. My nephew's conduct had appeared satisfactory, so far as we heard."

There Uncle Robert paused. He knew there were many things in school life that never came to the ears of parents or guardians.

"Yes. He was doing very well. Believe me, I am sorry, most sorry, that such a thing should have happened. And I could have pardoned it sooner if he had not been so obstinate."

Dr. Goldthwaite began to pace the room. Something in Mr. Conover's face touched him with a secret pain.

"I hope the consequences will not be more serious to any one else than to himself," Mr. Conover replied, gravely.

"They will be very serious to one person. No regrets, nor even money, can ever make amends. Mr. Conover, I would not have had this happen for a whole year's income; nay, more. And though the sufferer is only a poor old black man, the deed was just as shameful and terrible."

The Doctor's face flushed with excitement as he paused for a moment in his walk.

"Excuse me," he said. "I feel strongly in such matters as these. I have always tried to restrain my boys from any act of wanton cruelty, even to dumb brutes. I never considered it a prerogative of birth or wealth, and certainly no addition to the character of a gentleman."

Uncle Robert grew more anxious with every breath. "Will you tell me what it is?" he asked, interrupting the Doctor.

"Pardon my nervous incoherence, and believe me that I do feel sincerely sorry to be compelled to prefer such charges against a boy who has hitherto stood very fair. Now that the days are so long, the boys have an hour in the evening out of doors,—from seven until eight. Last Saturday evening they had planned some mischief, it seems. They are not allowed to go off the grounds during this hour. Old Cæsar, who has a cottage just a little below the extreme southern point of the grounds, and does much of the rough outdoor work, is often made the butt of some joke. He is a firm believer that the end of the world is fast approaching, and it seems that some of the boys made a figure, clothed it in white, and stood it against the doorway in such a manner that it must fall into his arms as he opened the door. It had been already ignited, and of course it blazed up, nearly frightening the old man out of his senses, while some one behind declared it to be the angel of the Lord. Jessup was on duty



that night, and, as the boys seemed disposed to straggle in, he went round to hunt them up. The blaze and the screams attracted his attention, though the cottage is surrounded by trees and hardly discernible; but he ran to the fence. Two or three boys passed him like lightning, and then he knew there was some mischief on hand. When he reached the spot the first person he saw was Alston."

A pained expression passed over Mr. Conover's face as he met the Doctor's glance.

"Alston ran off without a word. Mr. Jessup helped put out the fire. From the smell he judged there must have been some powder in the figure which had exploded. Cæsar howled and rolled on the floor in a paroxysm of terror, but finally Jessup left him to his wife's care. I was away, and did not return until nearly nine. Jessup told me the story after the boys were in bed. I went to see Cæsar the next morning, and found his face quite badly burned. The most unfortunate thing is that he will lose the sight of one eye, perhaps both."

"And you think — my nephew —"

Mr. Conover paused there. Heedless and full

of fun as Rob was, he could hardly believe that he had headed such a dangerous undertaking.

"He denies any knowledge of it, or at least taking any hand in it. But he knows something, I am very sure. He had a holiday that afternoon to go in town. And the week before he had bought some powder."

"What have you done with him?"

"Nothing was said until Monday morning. I sent for him and taxed him with the plot, enlarging upon its terrible consequences. To my great surprise, he denied it altogether, but when I pinned him closely he admitted that he did know something, but could not tell. He was punished, of course. I sent him to a private room and kept him on bread and water for the next twenty-four hours, only to find him more obdurate than ever, if such a thing were possible. I told him then that if he did not confess the whole affair by Wednesday morning, I should not only write to you, but have him expelled. He is still in the same state of mind. I have had another trouble as well this week. One of our pupils is lying very low with a fever, so you must pardon me if I seem unusu-

ally nervous. All these events have startled me out of my ordinary composure."

Mr. Conover was overwhelmed with pain and humiliation. Had Robert preserved a fair outside while he was allowing himself to become leagued with the worst boys in school?—for he knew well that no place, most of all a boarding-school, was entirely exempt. Many of his letters home had been so pleasant and cheery that it was painful to think him guilty of such deception. And it was like Rob not to confess upon compulsion.

"Believe me, Dr. Goldthwaite, that I regret this exceedingly. Still there may be something that will make the case look less black for him. May I see him?"

"I will send for him."

"I think, if you please, I would rather go to him."

"You will find the room very plain," said the Doctor, hesitatingly. "I have proved a day's solitary confinement very beneficial now and then, but we take care not to make it too agreeable."

"I shall not be over-critical. I know how hard it must be to keep a large school of boys in order."

"I will send and see if he is up," Dr. Goldthwaite responded, rather reluctantly.

The servant did her errand promptly.

Rob had been sitting by the window for a long time, and, feeling rather sleepy at last, threw himself upon the bed without undressing. Mary knocked twice.

Rob started up in vague alarm. "Who is there?" he asked.

"It is I, — Mary. Dr. Goldthwaite wished to know if you were up."

"Does anybody want me? O Mary, has my uncle come?"

"There is a gentleman with the Doctor."

"O, I guess it is! I want to see him right away. I am ready to come down."

"I have n't the key. He did not say anything about your coming down."

Rob's heart fell and a great lump seemed to rise in his throat.

"How is Ludlow, Mary?"

"Very poorly. In my opinion he is sinking fast. I don't believe he will get through the fever."

Rob shivered a little. Then he stood by the

side of the bed, listening. Full fifteen minutes it seemed, and yet it was hardly five. Afterward he heard steps again, and his heart beat quickly.

The door was unlocked. Uncle Robert entered with a lamp in his hand. Rob uttered a glad, relieved cry, and threw his arms around his uncle's neck.

"My boy!" He pressed his face closely against the boy's and found it wet with tears.

"O Uncle Robert, you don't believe all that horrible story,—do you? I am so glad you have come!"

"Then you were not the ringleader of this sad affair, miscalled fun?"

"I had nothing to do with it. O Uncle Robert, *do* believe me! Everything is against me, I know. But when Dr. Goldthwaite said he would send for you —" Rob's voice died away in a quivering sob.

His uncle placed the lamp on a little stand, and then both sat down on the side of the bed. There was no carpet on the floor, and but little furniture, — two chairs, a washstand, and the small table, — but it had a clean, wholesome look.

"Rob," his uncle said, kindly, "have n't you made a little mistake? I think the Doctor would have listened willingly to anything you had to tell. This hastiness, and—shall I call it obstinacy?—are old enemies of yours."

"I did n't have anything to tell; that was the worst of it, and two or three circumstances went awfully against me. The Doctor was very angry at first, and the thrashing made me feel as if I could strangle him. I did n't deserve it."

Rob's face was scarlet with remembered indignation.

"Will you tell me the whole story from the beginning?" his uncle asked.

"It is what I have wanted to do all the time. Somehow you can see things more clearly than other people, I believe," and Rob gave a faint smile as he pressed his uncle's hand. "I could n't tell what was the right thing to do, and it has puzzled me so much. Maybe I was too angry at first," he continued, reflectively.

There was quite a long silence. Uncle Robert drew the boy closer to him, and pushed the tumbled hair from the broad, smooth forehead. The

face seemed to have matured in these few months, and certainly gave promise of much nobleness.

“Begin, Rob,” the elder said at length, and the kind tones seemed to give him the requisite courage.

## CHAPTER II.

## OVER THORNS.

"WHEN I first came here, Uncle Robert, I was in two or three 'jolly larks,' as the boys called them. I don't know why, but there does seem a good deal of fun in doing forbidden things. About Christmas, though, I had a quarrel with Tracy, who generally led, and we have not been first-rate friends since. Perhaps it was just as well for me. There are some day-scholars, you know, and one of them, Gordon, took a great fancy to me. Every other Saturday we can go in town, so last Saturday I asked permission to go to Gordon's. They had a great crowd of company, and it was n't quite as pleasant as usual; that is, the girls were engaged, and we could not go into the fun. I stayed to supper, and left there a little after six. Then I thought I would go through the market, it is always so gay on Saturday night. So I loitered around, looking at everything, until I was surprised to find out how late it was.



"I put off pretty fast then. I thought I would take a short cut and enter the grounds instead of going round to the hall door. I had to pass Cæsar's cottage, and just in front of the door stood a tall white figure. The boys used to get off some pretty hard jokes on Cæsar until Dr. Goldthwaite stopped part of the fun by punishing several of them. In a moment there was a great knocking,—there were three or four boys holding the figure up, I am sure,—and just as Cæsar opened the door there was a great light and a fizz, and a voice sang out that it was the Angel Gabriel, who had come for him. He screamed, and I ran thither to see the fun, and almost tumbled over little Ludlow. Jessup came a moment after, and I suppose I *was* a good deal frightened at being caught there alone, so I made off as fast as possible, for Jessup is generally pretty hard on any boy he catches on a lark. There was n't a word said that night, and the whole crowd was as quiet and sedate as you please. We only have half an hour's study on Saturday evening. By the time the Doctor came home we were all safely stowed in our beds. No one so much as gave me a look the next day. Only just at

night it was whispered about that Cæsar's face had been dreadfully burned in some sort of a lark. The boys were all very good and serious on Sunday, as as if somehow they expected a storm by and by.

"And now this is the strangest thing of all, Uncle Robert, and perhaps it made me do just what I did. It was hardly daylight on Monday morning, at least not bright, when something came beside my bed and laid a burning-hot hand on my face. I started up and saw little Johnny Ludlow standing there like a ghost. My bed is in a small recess, quite screened from notice.

"'Rob,' he whispered, 'you won't tell on me,—will you? There will be an awful row, I know. I could n't help it. They made me go with them, but if I had known I would never have lighted it. They said it would only be a little fun, for Cæsar was always expecting the angel of the Lord.'

"'Who was it, Johnny?' I said, in a frightened tone. I could n't make out whether he was awake or asleep.

"'It would almost kill my mother, you know. My uncle is so strict that he would never do another thing for us, and poor mother could n't bear

the disgrace if I was sent away. Don't tell that you saw me. If you do, I will go drown myself in the river. Promise me, Rob.'

"He caught my hand and looked at me so strangely that I promised before I thought. It did n't seem as if any one could accuse me when I had not been around all the afternoon. Then Johnny kissed me half a dozen times with his lips that were like coals of fire, and glided off again.

"My verse that morning was this, from the Psalm beginning, 'Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle, or who shall rest upon thy holy hill?' 'He that sweareth unto his neighbor and disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance.' I could n't help thinking of Johnny. He was not present when the roll was called, and afterward some one said he had been taken to the infirmary in a raging fever. He had not been well for several days.

"The Doctor was awfully grave, but not a word was said until after breakfast. Then the whole thing came out. Somehow the flame and heat had gone right into Cæsar's eyes, and he was suffering dreadfully. They did not know at first but that he would be totally blind.

"Then, first of all, Dr. Goldthwaite called me out. Jessup stood there to face me.

"'You are sure you saw Alston at the door of Cæsar's cottage?' he asked.

"'Very sure. There may have been others, but he was the only one I saw.'

"'What time did he leave your house, Gordon?'

"It took Gordon a good deal by surprise, though I should not have wanted him to tell a lie for me. Then the Doctor asked me where I had spent the time, and who had been in the plot with me, and when I said that I had not been in it myself, and knew nothing about it until I saw the blaze there, he did not believe it at all. There was another thing that went against me. I bought some powder one day, as I had been using a lot of Gordon's. It is against the rules to have fire-arms in school, but I never thought about the powder, not meaning to keep it there long. I had n't paid Gordon, and it was nearly all gone. I suppose the Doctor told you all the rest?" and Rob paused in a rather choked voice.

"Yes, he went briefly over the circumstances," Uncle Robert said, thoughtfully.

"They let me go in and see Johnny. I think he knew me a little, for he looked up so pitifully and caught my hand. They had sent for his mother, for the doctor was afraid of the worst. Maybe I deserved the thrashing for having the powder, and for staying out later than I ought, yet it seemed so cowardly to pack it all on poor Johnny when he could n't say a word to defend himself. But I was so angry that I would not have told the little I did know then."

Rob made an impatient gesture, as if he could hardly be satisfied until he had it out upon somebody.

"My poor boy, the affair appears curiously complicated."

"But you *do* believe me, Uncle Robert?" he said, in a tone of earnest entreaty: "It is every word true. I did not know what to do when the Doctor threatened me with expulsion, but after he spoke of sending for you I resolved to wait. I have n't said a word since, but just stayed here on bread and water. Anyhow, I did not break my promise, even if it was to my hindrance"; and the boy flushed hotly.

That was like Rob. The stubborn sense of honor that would not be conquered, and verged so closely on obstinacy that one could hardly make a dividing line. Uncle Robert was quite puzzled. Dr. Goldthwaite might have been hasty and somewhat unreasonable, but Uncle Robert saw at once how much he must have been provoked by Rob's denial and subsequent firmness.

"How is Johnny now?"

"Very ill, they say. His mother has come."

Uncle Robert thought awhile.

"Rob," he began, with a tender smile, "it is a knotty point. I think I can understand how you felt about Johnny, but you are certainly absolved from the promise. There were some others engaged in the plot, and your slight clew may be the means of discovering the true offenders. I do believe that you have told me the simple truth."

"Thank you, Uncle Robert"; and there was a tremble in the boy's voice.

"So I should counsel your going at once to Dr. Goldthwaite. It may not be necessary to use Johnny's name publicly at present. Do you suspect any one?"

"I am almost sure that Tracy is at the bottom of it. He has a grudge against me, and, for that matter, it is returned. I would like to thrash him!"

"Rob!"

"You don't know what it has been, Uncle Robert. All the shame and mortification, and Old Goldy not believing a word! Why, I never had told him a lie! I was glad to get up here out of sight. I should like to make him take every word back before the whole school. I wish you would do it." For Rob felt now that he had found a champion. The first fright and bewilderment had worn off a little; but it left him, if possible, more indignant than ever.

"Will you go down and tell the same story to Dr. Goldthwaite?"

"Don't you think it was right for me to keep the promise?" Rob asked, in a little disappointment. He had been considering himself quite an ill-used hero.

"I told you it was a knotty point. You certainly did the noblest thing, whether it was wise or not. I believe I am the prouder of you for having done it. But it seems to me that there is

no longer any need of concealment, and the sooner the matter is explained the better."

Rob's eyes sparkled with the commendation. Then he rose, washed his face and brushed his hair. Mary was summoned again, and carried the message to the Doctor.

In less than five minutes they were seated in the Doctor's room, and Uncle Robert had made a brief explanation.

"I should have been glad to hear Master Alston's story before," remarked the Doctor, rather grimly.

"You gave me no chance to tell it," returned Rob, with unforgotten resentment. "Mr. Jessup was so sure that I had been the ringleader, and you believed him against my word. I have never told you a lie, Dr. Goldthwaite."

The Doctor raised his eyebrows at this impetuous speech.

"It seems to me that my nephew can exonerate himself from one charge, at least," interposed Mr. Conover.

"I shall be glad to hear him," repeated the Doctor, in a tone that still implied a doubt.

Rob began in considerable embarrassment. He



could talk so much more freely to his uncle. But before he had ended they were interrupted by Mary.

"If you please, Doctor, Master Ludlow is going on dreadfully, calling for Master Alston. They can hardly hold him in the bed. Mrs. Ludlow wants to know if he cannot come a little while."

They all started up. Rob looked inquiringly.

The demand seemed to come at an opportune moment. Dr. Goldthwaite led the way and the rest followed. The infirmary was rather dimly lighted at the lower end, where Conway lay asleep with a sprained ankle, and Bronson with some slight ailment. The principal point of interest was near the door, where the nurse and Mrs. Ludlow, a pale, delicate woman, stood over the low bed. The mother's arms were around her son. As they entered, he sprang up with a cry that was pitiful to hear.

"Why does n't he come? O Alston, you promised, you promised! I would not have minded but for mother's sake; poor mother, who has always been so anxious about me. And I would n't have done it if I had known there was any danger. But you promised!"

Obedying his first impulse, Rob went forward and took the boy's hand. He was past fourteen, but small of his age, and the wasted face was not much larger now than a baby's. The cheeks and brow were flushed with a deep unwholesome scarlet, and the soft hair was tumbled about.

"Johnny, don't you know me, — Rob Alston? I am here beside you"; and he put his arms around the child.

Johnny seemed for an instant to listen to the voice. Then he lapsed into another unquiet paroxysm, throwing himself wildly about and muttering.

"Look at me, Johnny!"

"I don't believe he sees at all, Master Alston," exclaimed the nurse. "He never blinked a bit when I put the light right in his eyes."

Dr. Goldthwaite stood in grave thought. Mr. Conover went forward and took the sufferer in his strong arms, that were so gentle withal.

"Talk to him, Robert."

"Did you want me to keep the promise, Johnny? Won't you tell me who the others were? At least, you will say that I had no hand in it."

"Yes, you promised. It will soon blow over. Was Cæsar's eye put out? Some one said — Rob —"

"Who were in the plot?"

It was Dr. Goldthwaite who spoke.

"They are not coming back. It won't make any difference. But if my uncle knew, he would be so angry. And all the disgrace! You know Dr. Goldthwaite said the boys who played the next trick upon Cæsar should be expelled. You won't tell, Rob, dear Rob? I am so tired, and my head aches. I was afraid I should wake up Morton coming to you. Take my hand; I shall feel safe then. You are so good and strong."

Dr. Goldthwaite studied the two boyish faces. Alston was right in one thing; he had been full of thoughtless fun and frolic, but he had never screened himself by a falsehood. He was not guilty of this, the Doctor felt assured, so he passed one hand over his shoulder. Rob glanced up in sudden surprise.

"O Dr. Goldthwaite," he began, tremulously, "won't you forgive Johnny? I know he never imagined that it would end so seriously. I will not mind all the rest, if he can—"

And then the awful thought of death rushed through Rob's mind. For Johnny was growing

quieter in his uncle's arms, the scarlet of his brow giving place to ashen gray. Maybe he would never need the forgiveness in this world. But for his mother's sake.

"Yes, please forgive him," pleaded Rob, his eyes glowing in earnestness and tears, and his whole frame quivering.

It touched the Doctor keenly. Rob had been punished unjustly, disgraced before the whole school, when he was innocent, because he would not break his word to a sick schoolmate, when, after all, it could not have brought the guilty ones to light.

"For your sake," he returned, a little huskily. "Master Ludlow is pardoned through your generous bravery. If he lives, he shall not be called to the slightest account. And you—"

"Never mind about me," Rob said, stumbling over the words, for his voice was full of tears. "I don't care now, since you believe I told the truth. I was obstinate and angry, but I did not know how far the promise ought to hold. And the verse I told you of—"

They looked at each other, but neither spoke. It was all understood. Resentment vanished upon

the one side, and faith was restored upon the other.

Mrs. Ludlow sat weeping. "What was it?" she asked. "I do not think Johnny would wilfully harm a fly. He has always been tender-hearted as a girl."

It was the girlish weakness that sometimes led him into scrapes, being made a tool of by older and stronger boys.

"It can hardly be explained," answered the Doctor, with a touch of embarrassment. "A very sad practical joke has been perpetrated, but the ring-leaders of the plot had older and more astute brains than Ludlow. Do not distress yourself, pray," for the pale face was painfully eager. "I suspected Alston and punished him wrongfully, for which I am truly sorry. I do not know that I can make better amends than to listen to his entreaties; and I repeat here that, for his sake, Master Ludlow shall be held clear."

The sick boy began to mutter and moan again, and throw his arms about.

"The physician left an anodyne," interposed the nurse, "but it seems to have very little effect upon

him. Perhaps we might better give him the rest."

They made way for her. Mr. Conover laid Johnny down on the pillow. For several moments Dr. Goldthwaite seemed lost in deep thought. That the "lark" would have a still sadder ending he well knew, but he resolved that the ringleaders should be severely punished.

"I think we had better retire for a while," he said, in a low tone. Then he promised the nurse that he would look in again in the course of half an hour.

Mrs. Ludlow pressed Rob's hand as he passed her, and gave him a thankful look.

They returned to the Doctor's room.

"Master Alston," he began, in a tone that was not yet free from emotion, "to-morrow this matter shall be set before the school in its true light. As a token of my regret for what has occurred, if you would like to share a guest-chamber to-night with your uncle, I shall be glad to accord you the liberty."

Rob was delighted with the permission. After a little more conversation, they proposed to retire. Word came that Master Ludlow had quieted down

somewhat; so they said a cordial good-night and parted.

"The Doctor was very noble about it, after all," Rob exclaimed, when they were alone. "I only hope he will find out who the real offenders are. Uncle Robert, do you suppose Johnny can get well?"

"The case is a very serious one indeed. He was not well before, you said."

"No. He was in the infirmary a day or two last week, but the boys always try to get out by Saturday, so as not to lose any fun."

"It is a very sad affair, but I am exceedingly thankful that it terminates so well for you, my boy."

"Uncle Robert, you don't think I could have told such a falsehood as that, even to save myself from being expelled,—do you?"

"No, Rob, honestly I do not. And I doubt very much whether it would have saved you. If Ludlow should rally a little and come to his senses at the last, as a person with a fever does frequently, the boys who are in this will be dealt with severely."

"I would rather suffer what I have than to be one of them."

There were so many things to say that it was midnight before Rob fell asleep, and it seemed to him only a moment before the great bell rang at six. At half past six every boy was expected to be in the chapel.

Rob and his uncle walked through the long hall together. Mary was crossing it, and he stopped to question her about Johnny.

"They are afraid he is sinking very fast," was the answer.

Tracy passed at the same moment, and eyed Rob rather curiously.

Rob listened in strange awe to the service. It had never appeared so solemn to him before. Less than a week ago, Johnny Ludlow stood opposite there, by the organ. He had a very sweet, boyish voice for singing. And now it might be that he was dying.

After this came breakfast. From half past seven until half past eight the time was devoted to study. Then, after half an hour's recreation, the ordinary duties of the day began.

They studied in the regular school-room, and thither the whole troop of boys went now. The



under-teachers did extra duty by turns. Last week Jessup had outdoor charge of the boys, this week it was within.

But the Doctor, beckoning Robert and his uncle, walked straight to the desk himself. Hosts of curious eyes peered from every corner.

"Boys," he began, "I have a few words to say and an apology to make before you all. I need not go over the circumstances of last Monday morning, as they are doubtless fresh in your minds. Everything conspired to prove Robert Alston guilty of a mean and dastardly outrage, but I have no words strong enough to express my contempt for the cowardly souls who, knowing him innocent, allowed him thus to be punished. This morning I am proud to exonerate him in your presence"; and, touching Rob upon the shoulder, he nodded to him to rise.

Interest, astonishment, and curiosity were depicted upon the faces turned toward the platform. Some were flushed and eager, but as the Doctor scanned them, he could not, for his life, have picked out the two or three guilty ones.

"Robert Alston told the exact truth, I have

every reason to believe. He was *not* concerned in the affair. At present I hold in my hand a slight clew, but before many hours I may know the whole truth. I hoped there was not a boy in this school so lacking in honor as this case has proved. There was theft in the first place in taking the powder from Alston's desk; and though I cannot think any of you would wilfully inflict such a terrible injury upon Cæsar, it humiliates me that there should be such cravens among you. If any boy knows aught of the matter, or who the ringleaders are, he will please inform me. As for the actors in this sad tragedy, if they are not utterly lost to all sense of honor and manliness, they will confess to me at once. They are sure to be detected in the end. I shall be in my room until recitation-hour, ready to listen. Alston, you may take your place among the boys, though your lessons for to-day will be excused. Mr. Jessup, see that all omission-marks against Alston are cancelled. He takes his rank in everything just where he was on Monday."

Then the Doctor turned and shook hands with him cordially. A little murmur ran through the room, growing louder and louder until it broke into

a perfect shout of vociferous cheering. They were all glad, for Rob was an undeniable favorite.

A crowd of boys thronged round him. "I never did believe it," "Give us your hand, old chap," "I'll bet on you," "You're plucky, Alston," and fifty more exclamations in boys' vernacular, until the room was in a buzz of confusion. Rob's heart beat rapidly, and his face flushed with emotion.

"The Doctor came out handsomely, did n't he?" was another enthusiastic comment. "It was a good deal for him to say. And you have not lost a mark! I wonder who it was; I would n't be in his shoes for a fortune!"

Mr. Jessup rang the bell peremptorily. "Boys, there is but half an hour for lessons," he said.

Then he turned to Rob.

"I am very sorry, Alston, that I should have helped in any way to place you in such an unfortunate position. I only told what I saw. But I am thoroughly glad that you are cleared. Somehow, it seemed to me, when you kept so rigidly to your own statement, that you could not be guilty. I will see that you have your standing."

"Thank you," Rob replied, cordially.

## CHAPTER III.

## A SAD ENDING.

TRACY remained indoors the half-hour of recreation, lounging through the halls, book in hand. Presently he waylaid Mary.

"How is he?" he asked, in a kind of fearful voice.

"Sinking away all the time. Last evening he was wild to see Alston, but since then he has been very quiet. He does n't seem to know any one."

Tracy turned ghastly pale, but he pressed his book against his cheek and tried to bite some color back to his lips.

"I wonder he did n't ask to see me. We have always been friends. Could he talk much then?"

"I don't believe he talked any, or, at least, very incoherently. Nurse thinks he knew something about —" nodding her head and lowering her voice.

"He and Alston?"

"No. It was n't Alston at all. But it is my opinion that poor Johnny Ludlow will never tell in this world. He has not spoken since twelve last night."

"How sad! Poor Johnny!" And yet Tracy drew a long, relieved breath. Since Johnny must die, what was the use of his blabbing at the last moment.

He went back to the room and studied. For that matter, Tracy always had excellent recitations.

The day wore on. Dr. Godfrey was in at ten and shook his head.

"He may last till midnight, but no longer," was his fiat in the room of the principal.

Few of the boys realized how sadly it was going with this one of their number. They were glad to get Rob back, and plied him with eager questions of what happened in the infirmary last night.

"I would rather not tell," he answered, with great delicacy. Since the Doctor had forgiven Johnny Ludlow, it seemed cruel to go on with surmises.

"Do you suppose he set fire to that figure, or whatever it was? Somebody said he was there. Did you see him?"

"Please don't question me at present."

Rob felt too full of pity and sympathy to use his knowledge publicly. There was a fine sense of honor within him as well, but, above all, a peculiar awe. It seemed such a terrible thing to die.

At three the school session ended. Rob had permission to go in town awhile with his uncle. They had a delightful walk and a conversation that Kathie would almost have envied. It was after five when they returned. A few boys hung about the hall with startled faces. Something was in the very air.

"O Alston —"

"Johnny?" That was all Rob could utter:

"He has just died. Is n't it awful?"

Rob clung to his uncle's arm. It was so good to lean upon some other person's strength. For an instant it seemed almost as if a cold, relentless hand might snatch at him.

There was a strange hush about everything. Servants came and went silently, knots of boys talked in whispers, and there was no rude play or jesting. Mr. Jessup had no trouble to keep order.

Dr. Goldthwaite had telegraphed the sad tidings home for Mrs. Ludlow. She had been left a widow

early in life, with this little boy, quite dependent upon a brother, for her own health was very delicate. He was a cold, austere man, but not grudging. Still, he would have visited any wrong-doing very severely upon the boy, who always stood greatly in awe of him.

Mr. Conover spent part of the evening with Mrs. Ludlow, and Rob was sent for also. She begged him to tell her the whole story, as she had already heard fragments of it. He did it very reluctantly.

"I can't believe that Johnny had much to do with it," he said. "He might have been dragged in with some other boys, but he never started any jokes or scrapes, and would coax us not to torment Cæsar. The boys used to laugh at him for being chicken-hearted."

"Thank you for the comfort." Her voice was very low and sad. "I wonder if boys ever think how very wrong it is to tempt one another into such misdeeds and disobediences. I am afraid poor old Cæsar will never be able to see the fun of that joke."

Rob felt the truth of her words. He could not help admitting just then that a good deal of their fun had been cruel and wanton. Was there not some better amusement?

On Saturday morning little Johnny Ludlow was brought down to the great hall, and the boys who desired went in to take a last look at their play-mate. The fever had worn<sup>a</sup> him very much, but otherwise he appeared sweet and peaceful. Only a week ago he had been running around with them. No one supposed last Monday that he was going to die. It spread a feeling of solemnity through all, from youngest to oldest. A death at school always seems terrible.

Mr. Conover had decided to accompany Mrs. Ludlow, in the place of one of the tutors. She clung to him in a kind of timid, entreating manner. His gentle courtesy was so different from the almost stern reserve she was used to at home, that it hardly appeared possible their acquaintance had begun so recently. Already he seemed like an old friend to her. It was his habit of doing good to all who came in his way, his kindly, Christian thoughtfulness, always ready but never obtrusive, that so won the hearts of others.

Rob followed him like a shadow until the latest moment, and resolutely winked the tears out of his eyes, rather ashamed to show so much emotion before the boys.



"I think I can safely trust you the remainder of the term," his uncle whispered with his good-by.

"O Uncle Robert, I wish I were going home with you!" and the first spasm of real homesickness that he had known rushed over him.

"It will only be a month to wait," was the cheerful answer.

From different points of observation the boys watched the two carriages drive slowly out of the wide gate. How startling it seemed to think that Johnny would never come back, never join in their songs or stand in their midst again! There was such a wide, awesome difference between this and the ordinary going home.

They were startled by the ringing of the great bell, and as they came quietly and slowly down stairs they were sent at once to the schoolroom. What terrible thing was about to happen?

Dr. Goldthwaite stood by his desk eying them sharply as they passed in and took their accustomed seats. Not a shuffle or a whisper, no nudging of elbows or sly pinches. A graver set of boys it would have been hard to find.

Dr. Goldthwaite cleared his throat and allowed

his eyes to wander slowly about, as if he were trying to read every boy's thoughts.

"I have called you together," he began, "not only to say a few words about your young schoolmate who has left us for the last time, but also to once more demand an explanation of last Saturday night's mystery. It seems by Ludlow's incoherent ramblings and Robert Alston's testimony that he was on the spot, and probably he knew all the actors in the sad tragedy. I do not doubt but that it was begun in a spirit of fun, but by it Cæsar has lost one eye, and it may be a long while before the sight of the other is restored. It is quite possible that the knowledge of this fatal result preyed upon Ludlow, who was not well at the time, and rendered his case more difficult to manage. That I am filled with the deepest sorrow and mortification for the good reputation of my school, I will most freely confess. I shall spare no effort to ferret out the guilty parties. It will hardly be possible for them to remain here another month without being detected, and then the punishment will be most severe. It will be much better for them to confess it now."

The Doctor paused and glanced slowly around. He did not expect to see guilt blazoned on any particular countenance, for he knew by experience that the old stagers in mischief were wont to carry themselves bravely. He had been so mistaken about Alston that he was not likely to be hasty in his next judgment.

Then he addressed them seriously and kindly. More than one heart was deeply touched, and when he spoke so tenderly of Ludlow it brought the tears to many eyes. When he ended the silence was most intense.

"You may now be dismissed to your ordinary enjoyments," he said, at length. "I have given the offenders an opportunity to confess to me in private, but I intend now that every boy shall affirm or deny as he leaves this room. I think one can hardly add an unblushing falsehood to such a deed."

The boys rose and fell into a line, marching slowly out. It seemed a very solemn ordeal to those who were innocent. Each one, put on his honor, and yet the last boy passed without a sign.

Dr. Goldthwaite pushed up his glasses and wiped

his eyes. Jessup and two others were standing near by.

"I would not have believed it," he said slowly. "I did not think there was a boy in this school so utterly hardened. Jessup, have n't you even a suspicion?"

"I saw no one besides Alston, not even Ludlow. Were there any stragglers that night, Mr. Casserly?"

"They are never in quite so promptly on Saturday night, but I don't remember any one coming in after the bell stopped ringing except Alston."

"And he is the bravest of the lot. I have always liked him."

"I suppose the mystery must rest here, then, until further developments," the Doctor remarked, as he turned away.

The boys dispersed in various directions, but play had lost its charm. The gymnasium and out-door turning-poles were deserted. Little knots gathered here and there, talking scarcely above their breath, and the whole place wore a Sunday-like solemnity.

A trio wandered about the lower part of the grounds, and finally took refuge beneath a great

oak, with their books in their hands. Their eyes wandered warily around now and then.

"You have only to keep your tongue between your teeth," said one, as if he might be reading a line from the page before him. "Dead people can tell no tales, luckily for us. It was Ludlow's fault, for he pushed it over. None of the rest meant anything of the kind, so why should we take the blame. It must never be spoken of again."

The secret was in good hands, and it did not leak out, to Dr. Goldthwaite's mortification. But it put an end to mischief for the present; and perhaps it was as well, for towards the end of the term the boys generally grew rampant.

About ten days afterward, Rob received a letter from Mrs. Ludlow, which he took to Dr. Goldthwaite, as she requested. Johnny had a bank-book on which there was between thirty and forty dollars, and this she proposed, if the Doctor approved, should be sent to Cæsar to help make amends for his misfortune. She would like to add twenty dollars to it herself. It was all to be done in Johnny's name, but she would like his friend Robert to undertake it, if the Doctor approved.

"It is very kind of her," said the Doctor. "I am not sure but some of the boys would like to have a hand in it. You may ask them."

Rob had been to visit Cæsar, as in fact had many of the other boys. The original plan of the "jolly lark" had not been at all terrible. The conspirators meant to make Cæsar believe that he had received a summons from the other world, to frighten him pretty thoroughly, and then listen afterward to the wonderful tales he would have to recount in his "'sperience," as he called it. But they had overcharged their figure, and been unwise to trust so much of the execution to Ludlow. So, instead of an angel, poor Cæsar had to bewail his terrestrial visitant.

Rob made a rush out to the playground and laid his plans before the boys at once.

"Capital!" declared half a dozen voices in chorus. "We will all go in for that. Poor Johnny!"

There was always a pause when his name happened to be mentioned, and the boys invariably looked at each other with questioning eyes. For there was no end to surmises as to who had been ringleaders in the plot. Each one had a slight se-

cret distrust of the other, except, indeed, Rob, who was very cordially exculpated from any share in the transaction, and transformed into quite a hero. In one way, the shock and trial were likely to have a beneficial result. It opened Rob's eyes to the fact that many of their jokes had been cruel. And when he saw poor Cæsar groping about with his bandaged eyes, his heart smote him for past pranks.

The whole school was much excited over the closing exercises, — Greek and Latin orations and numerous compositions. There were several prizes for the senior and intermediate grades. Rob's scholarship had enabled him to enter the intermediate department, but, it being his first year, he was not permitted to compete for any of the prizes. Still they were not so much engrossed but that they entered into Mrs. Ludlow's plan heartily.

In the course of a day or two a hundred dollars had been subscribed, and part paid over to Rob. With Dr. Goldthwaite's permission, he answered the kind letter, stating how much they were to add to the sum.

Mr. Conover had telegraphed home the first morning of his stay at Clifton Hall, and afterward writ-

ten. His journey with Mrs. Ludlow prevented his return on Saturday evening, and he therefore waited until Monday, since he knew the fears of the household at Cedarwood were set at rest. Mrs. Ludlow's brother had insisted upon his becoming their guest for the time.

The tidings proved a much greater shock to Mr. Alden than his sister supposed. Having no children of their own, both he and his wife were disposed to be rather strict and exacting; but in a deep reserved way he had been fond of the boy whom he expected to fill a son's place some day.

"I am so deeply indebted to you that I cannot express my obligation," Mrs. Ludlow said, at parting. "I shall always regret that your nephew was called upon to suffer for Johnny's sake, but he is a brave, noble boy, and he has lost in no one's estimation. May God spare him to you a long while!"

Then they clasped hands silently. A resolve came into Uncle Robert's mind, but this was no time to express it.

He did not reach home until quite late Monday afternoon. Bright-eyed Kathie was over to the station with the ponies.



"My dear child, I am glad to see you."

His grave tone startled her a trifle. It had not been possible to come from the bed of death and the side of the grave without bearing about some mark.

"Rob?" she asked, quickly.

"Rob is very well and happy, though he is longing to be at home. In a month we shall have him back with us."

"The trouble was not very serious, then?"

"Rob's share was not, I am thankful to say. There was a misunderstanding at the start of it, and all parties were a little hasty and unreasonable. It is a long story and will answer for our evening's talk. And now, what have you been doing? Have you missed me much?"

Kathie was all eagerness and interest, but she made a strong effort to overcome her desire, and began to entertain Uncle Robert with some pleasant little incidents.

They were just in time for supper. Afterward, sitting in Aunt Ruth's room, with his arm around Kathie's neck, he began the story.

Mrs. Alston interrupted him. "It was shamefully

unjust," she declared, warmly. "Dr. Goldthwaite had no right to punish Rob on a mere suspicion, when his character for truth was as fair, at least, as that of any other boy!"

"I think the Doctor was a little hasty. But, Dora, you must remember that circumstances were all against him, and that it is a hard thing to always judge and decide rightly among such a host of trying and mischievous boys. The Doctor had strictly forbidden them to play any practical jokes upon Cæsar."

"And this had such a terrible ending," remarked Aunt Ruth, pityingly.

"But I am glad that Rob kept his promise, and did not betray his little friend Johnny," said Kathie, for the chivalry in the act appealed to her.

"A bad promise is better broken than kept," Mrs. Alston replied. "It was a very unfortunate thing for him." For the mortification of having him punished before the whole school still stung her mother's pride keenly.

"It seems to me that Rob might have made a partial explanation, but I do not know as it would have helped matters much. Rob is quick of temper,

you know, and the dividing line between firmness and obstinacy is sometimes hard to find. I think with Kathie that Rob did the noblest, even if an ill-judged act. I am prouder of him, and his whole life may be the better for the sacrifice and the suffering. It would have appeared cowardly to throw the whole blame upon a sick schoolmate, who could not answer for himself."

"But it might have brought the real offenders to punishment."

"True. It is one of the incidents that we always wish had not occurred. But I doubt if Rob could have made Dr. Goldthwaite believe that he was at Caesar's cottage with no evil intent, unless Johnny had been well enough to exculpate him entirely, which he was not. The fever and delirium were upon him when he came to Rob's bedside, and from that time until he died he never uttered one perfectly coherent sentence."

"Poor Johnny!" Kathie said, dropping a few pitying tears. "But the boys who did it will be found out, — will they not?"

"If there were half a dozen in the plot I hardly fancy that the secret could be kept. It is such a

grave matter now that they will try their utmost, however. Besides all other punishment, the result would certainly be expulsion."

"How could they be so wicked?" said tender-hearted Kathie.

"I do not imagine that they fancied for a moment it would have such a serious ending. A 'bit of fun,' as boys say. To frighten Cæsar was their utmost intent; still, the gunpowder should have been left out. And, at the best, it was forbidden fun."

"I shall want to see Rob more than ever," Kathie declared.

"The boys have made quite a hero of him, you may be sure, for they always admire 'pluck,' as they call it. And I do believe Dr. Goldthwaite took Rob to his heart very warmly afterward."

Kathie raised her eyes with a sweet, half-shy expression.

"He has had some fighting to do and stood fire pretty well, I think. He deserves a place among the soldiers."

"My little girl, yes"; and Uncle Robert smiled, remembering the soldiers for whom they had hoped and prayed through the winter. "Rob has stood

the ordeal well and manfully, as we shall find when he returns. The year's experience may be of great service to him all his life."

"But O, won't it be delightful to have him home once more!"

And then she thought of the little boy who had been taken home for the last time, whose mother's vision was filled with a newly made grave. She would see daisies growing over it, but never again the dear face.

"Poor Johnny!" she said softly to herself, and dropped a tear to the stranger's memory.

## CHAPTER IV.

## BLOSSOM AND FRUIT.

KATHIE wrote a long and affectionate letter to Rob, and in return she heard who were to have the orations, who were trying for prizes, what hard work it was preparing for the examination, and all the particulars of Mrs. Ludlow's letter. The boys had raised over a hundred dollars; and what the tutors would give, besides the sum sent in the beginning, would amount to at least two hundred dollars. They were all to go in a procession to the cottage and have a grand presentation. Cæsar was improving very rapidly now.

Kathie had her own school affairs to attend to as well. The term was to close with an examination, to which friends and parents were to be invited. Besides the heavier studies, the utmost pains were taken with several really fine drawings and paintings in water-colors. Sue Coleman was working on some beautiful wax flowers. Emma Lauriston

had a colored crayon that was the admiration of the whole school.

"I wish I could do something," Kathie said, rather disconsolately.

Aunt Ruth looked up in quiet amusement, and perhaps there might have been the least touch of surprise in the expression.

"Something very beautiful, I mean," she corrected.

"I think there are many pretty things for you to do," was the rejoinder.

"I can draw tolerably, Aunt Ruth, but when you put my sketches beside Emma's they look poor and paltry. Every one of her pencil-marks seems like the line of an engraving. Then Sue Coleman does appear to have a natural gift for making wax flowers. Hers are never stiff or ungraceful. And Rose Mayhew does such beautiful embroidery. There actually is not anything left for me but second or third rate work. And there is to be a table in the room on examination-day, filled with specimens, with every girl's name attached to her work."

"And the second-rate place does not suit you very well?"

A little deeper voice than that of Aunt Ruth uttered this.

Kathie colored. "It is pleasant to be able to do something very well," she answered, with a bit of emphasis on the "very."

"Sometimes I think the 'next bests' are quite as pretty and entertaining in their way. Several of these girls are one and two years older than you, Kathie."

She knew that was meant to be comforting, but it seemed to her that she lacked the marvellous faculty some of the girls possessed. However, she smiled a little over her perplexity.

"But *what* shall I do, Uncle Robert? It is quite a puzzle to make something pretty to go on the table; for each girl is to do it without any assistance, though I suppose she might be allowed a little counsel."

"I believe I don't know much about young ladies' schools, but I should think among drawing and painting and moss-work and shell-work and embroidery and wax flowers there would be quite a variety."

"O, I believe I will make a pretty shell frame!"



and the old bright look returned to Kathie's eyes. "It may not display so much genius, but it will be odd and make a variety."

For one girl after another had said, "I hope every one will not make flowers, or paint, or draw"; and, after choosing their pet employments, there appeared very few left, except to take second or third rate places, as Kathie had declared.

She looked up her shells in a day or two, and spent her leisure time in sorting them, drawing a design, and getting her frame ready. The studies about this time demanded considerable attention.

Kathie happened to go to school quite early one morning, as Uncle Robert had an appointment with a gentleman in the village, and asked her to drive with him. She knew that she could go over her exercises as well there, in the quiet room, as at home.

So she hung up her hat and sat down by the open window, having a silent ten minutes to herself. Then a rather clumsy step came up the stairs. It was Mary Carson, with a box in one hand and something pinned in a coarse brown paper.

Earlier in the winter there had been an attempt

made to divide the school into patricians and plebeians by a foolish young lady who had more pride than sense, but the plan had fallen through in ignominy. Kathie had been pushed over to the plebeian side from envy and ignorance, for there were some girls in the school less refined and agreeable. Mary Carson was one. It had proved a rather sad time for Kathie, and yet, in the end, she had learned some useful lessons. Down at the bottom of nearly everybody's soul there is something warm and sweet.

Mary had carried herself with a great deal of ridiculous pride at first, because her father was rich and they lived in a grand house. But Mrs. Wilder endeavored to correct this foolish habit, and had led Mary to overcome it in some degree.

She looked so bright and pleasant now that Kathie bade her a smiling good-morning.

"O Miss Alston! I did n't expect to find any girls here. Mrs. Wilder, you know, said she would be early every morning, and I wanted to ask her —"

Mary came to a long pause, and a wistful expression overspread her face. In her heart she held a secret and rather grudging admiration for Kathie,

whose golden hair, fair, delicate complexion, and pretty hands and feet, seemed to stamp her a lady.

"If I can assist you in any way—"

"O no, Miss Alston, it was not that. But I have half a mind to tell you a secret."

"Don't tell me if you ought to keep it"; and Kathie smiled with sweet cordiality, so that her manner might not appear ungracious.

"I believe I will, though I would n't tell another girl. I am making something for examination-day that will be"—and she blushed with a little embarrassment—"as good as anything else, I guess. I can't draw and I can't paint, and somehow I always soil embroidery so dreadfully. We have a beautiful shell basket at home that one of my aunts made last summer while we were at the seaside. So I thought I would make a shell frame. Ma bought me a beautiful lot of shells. I do not believe there will be one on the table. I have been listening to the girls' plans, and not one of them has mentioned it. Maybe they think it old-fashioned or something. But mine is going to be a beauty."

Kathie colored, and, though her breath fluttered a little, said in a sweet, steady voice,—

"May I see it, please? I will promise not to speak of it."

Mary began to unpin her paper, and presently disclosed a half-completed frame. The outer edge was square, but the inner corners were filled up with very fine shells, making it an oval. The combination of delicate coloring was really beautiful, as well as the patterns selected.

Kathie's face lighted up with surprise and pleasure.

"Is n't it nice, Miss Alston?"

There was a little tremble in Mary's voice, as if she were not quite sure of the verdict.

"It is not only pretty, but done with a great deal of skill and taste. What lovely shells! Why, you are quite a genius, after all."

"I can do some things, if I cannot make wax flowers." Sue Coleman had snubbed Mary rather unmercifully, and there was a sore remembrance rankling in her heart. "I like to do this, though it is awful poking work, like the coral islands we learned about."

"There are a good many things in life like them," Kathie returned, slowly.

"I don't believe there will be another one,—do you? I am so glad. If I had done anything else, the girls would have said I was copying from them. Now no one can. I am just going to ask Mrs. Wilder something about it, and then I shall take it home again."

Mrs. Wilder came in shortly afterward, and her warm praise delighted Mary, who presently hid her treasure from curious or supercilious eyes. Kathie was in a rather thoughtful mood all the morning. When she came home in the afternoon, she ran up to her room and took a look at *her* frame.

If anything, Mary had the finest selection of shells. The two would be about alike in merit. But how Mary would enjoy doing something really praiseworthy, and having the credit of it all alone, without any invidious comparisons or comments! So, if she gave hers up and let Mary have the pleasure alone—

After all, the second-rate place was not so bad if she did the best she could. She must come back to the pencil sketch, then, for that was her next best.

Mrs. Wilder was to have quite a reception of it.

Cards of invitation were sent out, the large room was cleaned up beautifully the Saturday before, and some extra touches added on Wednesday afternoon.

"I have heard nothing about the frame," said Uncle Robert. "Have you been doing your good deeds in secret, and do you mean to surprise us to-morrow?"

"No," she answered. "I changed my mind about it. I have selected something else."

"Did the work prove too tiresome?"

"No, Uncle Robert. I will tell you just why," she went on after a pause, and began with Mary's story.

"But they would not have been alike," he said, with a half-smile.

"It was not that. The girls—or some of them, at least—have a fashion of sneering at Mary. I do not think she is cultivated or refined, but it does seem as if she had improved some in the last three months. If the two frames were there they would be compared, and every little difference in mine would be made a virtue of, because"—and Kathie made a long pause—"the girls love me the best."

"So you thought it would interfere with Mary's pleasure?"

"Yes, it would, Uncle Robert"; and Kathie's voice grew a little stronger. "She confided it to me as a secret, and maybe *she* would have thought that I took up her idea. Somehow, this sentence kept running through my mind,—‘In honor preferring one another.’"

"I am very glad to have you put the lesson to a practical use"; and he stooped to kiss her.

"It seems to me that the nice things, even if one does not explain them all, help another person to come up faster. Mary won't know anything about this, but the praise will be very sweet to her. She is sometimes quite coarse and bitter to the girls who are continually looking down on her and fretting her with a sense of their superiority, but I believe she does honestly try to be gracious towards the others."

"A little of the lifting up that this world needs. What looks so much like being out of place, oftentimes is only the floundering about to find the right place. But what is your contribution to be now?"

"I came down to the 'next best.' After all, I

have so many delights and pleasures that I need not long to be first in everything."

"I am glad to have you feel that way. Suppose we finish the frame some time for our own amusement."

"O, I should like that"; and a light danced into the clear eyes.

The hour for the reception was ten. Long before that the girls came, dressed in their best, to do honor to the occasion or to themselves. Mrs. Wilder had the long table arranged and covered with a white cloth. Then the articles were brought out.

Emma had a pretty little black-walnut easel for her picture, which they all declared must go in the centre. Then Sue's lovely flowers.

"Mary Carson has an immense pincushion," whispered some one.

"Covered with dimity, and trimmed with red braid and cotton edging."

That made a little titter. You can almost always tell when any one is laughing about you. Mary's face grew very red.

"Here will be a nice place for your frame, Mary," said Mrs. Wilder, and she began to take it out of the wrappings.



The girls glanced across the table curiously. Mrs. Wilder fitted it into a convenient position.

Rose Mayhew and Jennie Dillson began to inspect it critically.

"How very pretty!" Emma Lauriston exclaimed, leading opinion boldly. "Why, Miss Carson, you must have had an infinite deal of patience!"

Mary was so pleased that the tears almost rushed to her eyes, making them glisten.

Then some very fair sketching and water-coloring, daintily embroidered initials and monograms, worsted work, silk work, plain sewing, an array of neatly filled copy-books, and faultless French and German exercises, problems in algebra and geometry, worked out in a manner that would have done credit to the Academy boys.

There was quite a large audience of stylishly dressed ladies, and a number of gentlemen. Both of the clergymen present made a short address, and the young ladies were praised and congratulated. Mrs. Wilder had proved herself an excellent teacher, and the school was an established fact, destined to be an honor to Brookside.

"It has been very entertaining," Aunt Ruth said

to Kathie, who looked as happy as if half the compliments had been showered upon her. "I am glad that you did not try to dispute honors with Miss Carson."

"But *do* you really believe Mary Carson did that?" Sue whispered. "I half suspect her mother went to the city and bought it."

"I saw it when it had only one corner done," Kathie returned, really glad to have the opportunity of answering for Mary. "She brought it to school one morning to consult Mrs. Wilder."

"And made you the depository of her precious secret," continued Sue, giving a satirical laugh. "But I really cannot think she has brains enough to do such a thing. She must have had some assistance."

"Let us try and be fair with her," Emma Lauriston said, quietly. "I think she has improved lately."

Mrs. Wilder turned suddenly. Sue and Emma colored with a peculiar consciousness, but there was a very cordial smile on their teacher's face.

"I do believe, girls," she began, in a low, friendly tone, laying aside the distance that her years and

position naturally gave, "that we have all been learning some lessons out of the regular school routine. I suppose there will never come a time in the history of the world when the incessant strife as to who shall be greatest will cease. But now and then, in some little corner, a lump of leaven will be hidden in the flour by a generous, kindly soul, and before long we see its quiet work. And it has always seemed to me that if we possess any grace or gift or virtue that can rouse and warm and vivify any other human being, we ought to use it for that purpose, rather than to shut all the sunshine within ourselves."

A perplexed light shadowed Sue's face. After a moment, she said, frankly, "I don't seem to understand where and how to make the distinction. You can't be hand and glove with every one, and some people *do* suit you much better than others. And yet, if you take them all in — No, it could n't be done."

Mrs. Wilder smiled. "The trouble with most people is that they look at the great aggregate of work, the great mass of people to be raised, and it appears so vast that they shrink back in dismay.

But if every girl or every woman would lend a helping hand to just *one* struggling soul, would there not be a deal of work done? And you might all take some person whom you liked tolerably well."

"I don't believe any of us besides Kathie Alston knows how," Sue said, softly. "But, Mrs. Wilder, are you never fretted by common and vulgar people?"

"About as often as I am fretted by refined and educated people. We need not go far for an illustration. How many of you really *loved* Isabel Hadden last winter?"

The circle had enlarged by two or three listeners. Now the girls stared at one another in blank astonishment.

"One of the best rules for life is never to say anything unkind of an absent person, but since our last winter's affair caused me so much pain and trouble, I want to extract therefrom a lesson for you all. If Miss Hadden had been poor, do you not believe her disagreeable qualities would have had more effect upon you than her agreeable ones?"

"But Belle *was* refined. She never used bad grammar or fell into other abominations of behavior."

"In one way she possessed much aptitude, and had been at school nearly all her life. Still her average was not more than one perfect lesson in a day, and she was seldom correct in her deportment. I think many of her faults were due to her superficial training. But I never could see just what quality she possessed to make her the leader of the school, and to decide for the greater part of you girls who should be held upon a social equality and who should not."

Sue's face was scarlet. For a moment or two no one spoke.

"I wonder at it myself now," Sue said presently. "We *did* have a great time. We banned girls right and left, and all because —"

Kathie Alston had slipped away in the beginning of the talk. Sue glanced around furtively now, and then went on:—

"It was nearly all because Kathie Alston had once been poor, and, now that she was rich, undertook to leaven the lump, as Mrs. Wilder says; that is, to be polite and attentive to people who were not on a social equality with herself. But I met that Miss Streng at her house once, and she is not so bad, after all; quite subdued and proper, in fact.

And I believe the 'patricians' in school last winter did not represent the noblest or most admirable element."

"I am glad you have reached that conclusion. Miss Hadden, I think, made herself much more disagreeable, and caused me a great deal more trouble than Miss Carson."

"I am heartily ashamed of my share in the disturbance, Mrs. Wilder," Sue answered, with a blush and a rather embarrassed laugh. "There, I am glad I have said it. It has been on my mind this ever so long, and now I shall feel easy."

"And I want to thank you for the kindly spirit you have all manifested during the last term. It has made our daily sessions much more pleasant, and encouraged me in my work. You are all learning lessons now that you will carry through life, and it seems most necessary that your idea of refinement should be the true one, comprehending generosity as well as outside grace."

The small crowd of visitors began to surge up round the group by the table, and Mrs. Wilder turned toward them. Mrs. Alston stood talking to overdressed Mrs. Carson. The difference between

them was plainly visible without the aid of any haughty airs upon Mrs. Alston's part.

"But Mrs. Hadden would have withered her by a look," Sue thought. After all, was n't the building up better than the pulling down?

Emma Lauriston went over to Mary Carson with something in her hand, — one of her exquisite clusters of flowers done in water-colors.

"It will just fit your frame," she said, "and I should like you to have some pleasant reminder of our closing term. When you meet with a prettier picture you can take that out, you know."

"O Miss Lauriston, I never shall want to, it is so beautiful! Thank you a hundred times. No one in school paints as you do. O mother, please look here."

"A little leaven," whispered Sue.

Then the girls said their good-bys in as lugubrious a fashion as if it was to be years, instead of days, ere they would meet again. The large table and some of the desks were loaded with books and parcels to be taken home, or sent for afterward.

"What a pity we are not boys!" exclaimed some one. "It does n't seem natural to close school without one grand good hurrah."

## CHAPTER V.

ROB.

JUST as the carriage passed the gates there was a grand shout that could come from no other throat than that of a strong, healthy, glad-hearted boy. Kathie had been standing on the broad piazza, but now she sprang down the steps with a cry of welcome. Almost a year since she had seen Rob!

He gave a spring out of the carriage and clasped Kathie in his arms. Why, was this Rob, towering way ahead of her, the round boyish face changed in almost every respect, and the strong arms fairly lifting her off the ground?

"O mother! Aunt Ruth! How good it is to see you all again!"

Taller than mamma! An odd, almost bashful consciousness came over Kathie. Had she any claim on this big boy, this young man, rather? But there were his merry eyes, his curly chestnut hair, and the frank, laughing lips. Quite handsome, too, and at that she blushed a trifle.



"Everything is just the same," he declared. "You have n't changed a bit. O Freddy!"

The child caught his arm with both little hands, and Rob swung him high off the floor. Indeed, he described a circle so far over the steps that Mrs. Alston sprang forward in alarm.

"O, it was splendid!" exclaimed Fred, with a long breath of delight. "Can't you do it again? Why, you are as strong as a—a giant!"

"Not over the steps," said his mother. "You can have a good romp out on the lawn, where the ground is soft if you should fall. Dear Rob!"

For her heart was full. His school-year had been a long and anxious one for her. Even now she could hardly realize that she had him safe under her own wing once more. Yet with the joy came also the certainty that he was fast growing into manhood. A few more years and he would try life for himself. The mother's sole right must merge into that of the friend,—sometimes, indeed, to be pushed aside for a newer interest, to be doubted when others were believed.

"Yes, you all look well and delightful, and everything is just lovely. You can't think how nice it is,

after the sameness and strict regulations of school, and nothing but boys except the three or four fussy old women. And now tell me about everybody. I am actually famishing for news. Come into the circle, Aunt Ruth, — a new demonstration, — not exactly squared, but in parallel lines.”

With that he drew his mother and Aunt Ruth to a seat on the top step, while Kathie and Fred curled themselves next below, so that they could watch every movement of the bright face.

“Are the boys home yet, — Lauriston and Hinckley and the others? And how is Charlie, the sober little prig? Would n’t he get the starch taken out of him in the rough-and-tumble life at boarding-school? And yet there is a good deal of real fun.”

“You are just in time for the closing of the Academy, Rob. It is to be next week. Dick and Charlie and several others are to graduate,” Kathie said.

“Just the thing. I’ll be in at the death, sure. What a gay old time we had last year! O, it seems like a century to think of it! What loads of fun there used to be! Sometimes I have wished myself back again, I can tell you. I could n’t half write to the boys, because your letters are under some

sort of inspection,—at least, all but home letters. I wonder if I can make up all the lost knowledge in three months,”—with a merry twinkle in one eye, which gave him an exceedingly droll look.

The same Rob. Not an inch of amusement must be crowded out of his life, even if it went in by the hardest squeeze.

Uncle Robert came up the walk, having finished his conversation concerning the work for the next day and dismissed Mr. Morrison.

“Well, Rob, how does home seem?”

“Just the thing. The centre of attraction, you see”; and he leaned down on Aunt Ruth’s shoulder. “Only I have a kind of feeling that I have outgrown you all except Uncle Robert. Why, Aunt Ruth seems like a little girl!”

“You have grown wonderfully,” said his mother.

“I felt almost afraid of him at first,” rejoined Kathie; and she still glanced out shyly, as if he might prove to be some other boy by mistake.

“Where is Mr. Meredith? So everybody came home safely from the war, just as they used in Kathie’s fairy stories. O Uncle Robert!”

The boy paused and stretched out his hand with

a sudden impulse. Less than a year ago he had sat on these very steps hurraing for the draft and laughing over the compulsion. Uncle Robert had been taken, and another had gone in his place. But if —

“You understand a little about the substitute business now, Rob,” his uncle said, returning the warm clasp.

“Yes, there is a good deal of earnest to it all. I suppose you told them —” and he glanced round at the little group.

“O Rob, I thought it was so noble in you!” and Kathie twined her soft arms about Rob’s neck, kissing the rosy cheeks many times. “Poor little Johnny!”

“It was very sad indeed,” said Aunt Ruth. “Most of all I pitied his poor mother.”

Rob glanced up at *his* mother, and saw the tears shining in her eyes. And somehow, thinking of the greater separation, this lesser parting of the past year was invested with a new sanctity in his eyes. A feeling of chivalry crept through the crust of rough boyishness, that, after all, was more like the chestnut-burr, and would

have its time of ripening and falling, leaving the man's soul disclosed to view.

"I should judge by Dr. Goldthwaite's last note that his confidence in you is entirely restored," Uncle Robert remarked.

"He was very kind at parting, and hoped that nothing would happen to mar our coming year. I believe he did feel real sorry, but he made it up to me tenfold. I am sure there could not have been anything finer than the manner in which he cleared me before the whole school."

"And the guilty parties have never been discovered?"

"No. There are some strong suspicions, but after the Doctor had made one mistake, he naturally felt rather careful. And, Uncle Robert, boys *can* keep secrets. It is quite difficult to find the author of a school frolic."

"I hope they are seldom such terrible ones as that," said Mrs. Alston.

"O mother, no one meant that should be so terrible. If it had gone off successfully there would have been ever so much fun afterward, when Cæsar came to tell about his vision. He was always seeing

signs and wonders, and it was such a temptation to play tricks upon him. But I don't believe it will ever be done again,—at least, not while the old boys are there."

"Has he recovered?"

"O yes. He can see as well as ever with the one eye, and all the boys were very generous indeed. It was so good in Mrs. Ludlow to think of that offering. Every one would have joined in it for Johnny's sake, if for nothing else."

"It is n't fair for the large boys to drag the little ones into their mischief," Kathie exclaimed, warmly. "I feel as if Johnny would have been a nice boy but for the others."

"That is what one has to learn," Rob said, soberly,— "not to be dragged into scrapes."

"Have you learned it?" asked his mother.

Rob colored, and answered with an evasive laugh.

"Just a little. You know I had a lesson or two before I went away,"—glancing at Uncle Robert.

"And you were not homesick?" said Aunt Ruth.

"Well, not much. I did n't feel it at first a bit. It was all so odd and funny with that great army of boys and the new regulations, so different from

the experience of a day-school. After the novelty wore off, I used often to wish that I could drop down upon you for a few days, but I think I really felt the worst when Uncle Robert came home the last time."

The supper-bell rang at that moment. Rob made a spring.

"I have n't even shaken the dust off my feet, or washed it off my face," he said, laughingly. "Mother, is my room in the same place, with all the appurtenances thereof?"

"I opened it and put it in beautiful order," Kathie replied.

"I shall be back in a moment, by the time you are seated"; and the last of his sentence was finished at the head of the stairs.

How natural everything looked! The room with its pretty adornments, so different from the plain beds and washstands at school, the curtains at windows that seemed to filter the western sunshine through, and here was a lovely vase of flowers that shook out a delicate fragrance every time the wind came wandering through the half-closed blinds. A quaint, summery picture that somehow went to the

boy's half-developed heart and stirred it, for all the world like yonder breeze and the heliotrope, and maybe touched the hidden sweetness nestling out of sight, but still there. It is strange how many things *do* get out of sight with boys.

He washed his face and "ducked" his curly head in the large white bowl. How delightful the towels were, with their suggestiveness of new-mown hay or sweet clover, and the coolness of the smoothly ironed linen. There was his beauty of a bed; he longed to give a run and jump into the middle with a somerset. Some one had brought up his trunk, so he slipped on a clean collar and took out a fresh handkerchief, giving a regretful look to all around and promising himself a grand good inspection to-morrow morning, and ran down, feeling as fresh as a rose.

Mrs. Alston had just finished putting sugar in the cups, and they were all waiting. Rob slipped into his place as if he had only gone out of it yesterday. And yet there was a little change. Jane Maybin stood beside his mother with her small waiter in hand, ready to pass the cups. No shuffling and crowding and elbowing, and he al-



most felt as if he was out somewhere and on his good behavior.

They had a very pleasant, genial meal, enlivened with several of Freddy's quaint observations. The numerous out-door pets were still flourishing, though some of the houses were rather too small or dilapidated, and needed Rob's urgent attention.

After supper he felt wonderfully as if he wanted to go out and see the boys. It would be rather mean though, when he had been away from home so long, and they all were not half talked out. But he rambled up and down the lawn rather restlessly, with Kathie on one side and his uncle on the other.

"Hillo!" exclaimed a fresh, familiar voice.

"O Dick, old fellow!"

"Why, Rob, you have grown almost beyond recollection! has n't he, Mr. Conover? This is an unexpected pleasure. I ran over to see if there was the slightest possibility of your being home in time for our grand wind-up. I want you to come so much!"

"I will be there, sure. What day?"

"Next Tuesday. There is to be a scattering of

the forces after that. O, Charlie Darrell does n't know a word, does he? I've stolen a march on him this time. When has he been over here, Kathie?"

"Not since last Saturday."

"Charlie is to graduate?"

"Yes. He's a splendid hard student. He has just gone through everything this year like a ball through the wickets. I never saw such a fellow, but Mr. Crittenden thinks he has had rather too much of it, and has advised his father not to let him go to Yale next year."

"I should n't wonder if I broke my constitution some day by hard study," said Rob, drolly.

"You don't look as if it was the least bit cracked yet. Stand up, Rob, and let us measure."

Almost head to head.

"And I am a year and a half the older," exclaimed Dick. "Why, you will be a six-footer! And about the rowing,—are we to have any more fun this summer?"

"I am in for anything jolly. After one has been kept on short rations at a boarding-school —"

"I do not think they were very short, Rob," said his uncle, with an amused expression.

"I dare say Rob has some gay stories to tell. You will have a good audience among the boys. I only wish we were all through and had nothing to do but enjoy ourselves."

Uncle Robert laughed.

"There is a long three years' pull ahead of us," said Dick, "and years and years beyond that. Somehow I shall be positively sorry to outgrow boyhood. And since we have all known you, Mr. Conover, it has been ever so much nicer."

"Thank you for the compliment."

"It is all true"; and Dick blushed ingenuously.

"You are really going to Yale?" said Rob.

"Yes. Father has decided upon that for me. But what I am to do afterward—" And Dick made a long pause.

"I have decided upon half a dozen different things," Rob remarked, laughingly. "But I am bound to do something that has a good deal of travelling in it. I could n't stay at home and settle down."

"You were once going to be a hunter at the West,—were you not?" said Kathie.

"A reminiscence of a few stray dime novels. I thought them wonderful then. And running away

was, at one time, the height of my ambition. Uncle Robert, I do believe boys are queer things, after all. But our taste of camp-life last summer was royal."

"It was just that. I hope it may come over again some time. O, I had a letter from Fred Lauriston awhile ago. He is at Cornell University, you know, working his way up in a splendid fashion. There is plenty of pluck in him. But he is counting strong upon coming home again."

"How strange it will be when we are all men in good earnest!" and a thoughtful light filled Rob's eyes.

"It will not be so very long, either. But I told mother that I would n't stay ten minutes, and I must run back. We shall count on seeing ever so much of you, Rob, as soon as the folks can spare you. Good night, Kathie. I expect you to listen very attentively to my oration on Tuesday next. Arm yourself with a large bouquet."

"Hollyhocks and sunflowers," suggested Rob.

The two boys walked down the path together, for there were ever so many last words, and the first words were only begun. But Rob felt that this, of all other evenings, belonged to his mother, and

did try hard to curb his impatience, wondering a little what always made him feel so delighted and at home in boys' society.

Uncle Robert and Kathie were talking about Emma Lauriston.

"Rather rough, is n't it," said Rob, "that Emma will have such a fortune by and by, and that Fred has to pinch along and get his education by the hardest? I suppose she sets up for a fine lady."

"No, she does n't," returned Kathie, warmly. "I think she is noble and generous, and I do believe the elegance and refinement come natural to her. Then she could not help having the money,—or, at least, its being willed to her. She would divide it with Fred in a moment, I know."

"Well, it is a great shame. I am sure I should think it real hard."

"I suppose the children's grandmother did it for the best. Fred's mother had quite a fortune in her own right, but somehow it all slipped through Mr. Lauriston's hands."

"So out of revenge she determined that Mr. Lauriston's son should not have anything of hers," said Rob.

"Perhaps that was not quite it," returned his uncle. "She may have reasoned that Emma was a girl, and less able to do for herself, and that the fortune was not very large."

"Fred told me once that his grandmother Kellar never liked him."

"I hardly believe she loved either of the children," said Mrs. Alston. "All their earlier years she allowed them to be entirely dependent upon their grandfather Lauriston, and even now the small portion allowed Emma would not be sufficient to take care of her in a stranger's house. She cannot have the whole income of her ten thousand dollars until she is eighteen."

"Which looks, after all, as if she<sup>e</sup> was afraid that Emma might help him. She will be a fine lady, I suppose. Does she look down upon you in a superb fashion, Kathie?"

"O Rob, you don't know her at all, nor how loyal she was last winter! She is n't that kind of girl."

"There never was but one real splendid girl, and that is Miss Jessie,—Mrs. Meredith, I mean. Does n't it seem funny to call her by a new name? And to think she is actually Mr. Meredith's wife. I

don't see why he wanted to get married. Girls *do* spoil everything, after all."

Uncle Robert laughed. "You will have half a dozen different opinions about that before you are twenty," he said.

"Do we spoil a little corner of your life?" asked Aunt Ruth of the boy.

"O no; I did not mean that. I was thinking of strange girls, like — like Ada Meredith, for instance."

And with that Rob laid his head in his mother's lap. She sighed softly. Would any experience or trial ever lead him to love her best of all? Had it been wise to let him begin the world so young?

## CHAPTER VI.

## AN OLD FOE IN THE WAY.

It was comforting to lie in bed the next morning with no fear of the peremptory bell when one was in the midst of a delightful drowse. Rob lay thinking in a lovely, disconnected fashion, with now and then a wink of sleep sandwiched between, until Freddy, whose patience was exhausted, and who had run away from mamma for this especial purpose, called loudly at the door.

"Can't I come in?"

"Yes," answered Rob, rubbing his eyes.

Fred inspected the face upon the pillow with a great deal of curiosity and deliberation.

"I am all here," said Rob, "body and boots,—at least, my boots are there on the floor, after the fashion of John Gilpin's wig."

"Did your horse run away?" asked Fred, soberly, trying to solve the connection between bald-headed John Gilpin and curly-headed Rob Alston.



"Run? — yes! You never saw anything like it. An iron horse with one eye, and whose principal sustenance is wood and water, with never a bit of pie or cake — or oats, for that matter."

That extinguished Fred. He looked about vaguely for a moment, then made his essay.

"I say — Are n't you going to get up, Mr. Lazybones?"

"I think I will, to oblige you especially. In the mean while, my dear prime-minister, you may go down stairs and announce that his Majesty Robertus Alstoninus is on his way to the morning repast of nectar and ambrosia, served by Aurora, goddess of dawn."

Freddy trotted down.

"Rob is sick," he announced, breathlessly. "He is talking deliriums."

"School-boy Latin, I suppose," said Uncle Robert, with a laugh.

"What made you disturb him, Freddy? I meant that he should have a good long nap this morning," remarked Mrs. Alston.

Rob sprang out of bed in the olden school-boy fashion, and was ready in a trice, while Freddy

was settling himself in a chair and unfolding his napkin.

How could his mother help being proud of the fine figure and fresh, rosy face? Not one of the purely handsome boys, but wonderfully attractive in the crisp vigor and sparkle, and the glad life that shone in his eyes and laughed in the curves and dimples about his mouth. If he was heedless and a little rough and cold now, would not the soul take its time for growing and developing by and by, when the strong animal spirits had effervesced?

"We heard grave accounts of you," announced his uncle, — "that you were gone in a delirium."

"O Dr. Freddy," laughed Rob, "you will have to go to school another term and study the first grade of Latin before you begin to practise."

"I am studying now," said Freddy, with great seriousness.

"Oh! are you? Have you gone as far as

'Hic, hæc, hoc,  
The lamb of the flock'?"

Kathie laughed. "I have n't come to that myself," she said.

"Perhaps Rob thinks it more appropriate for Freddy," remarked Aunt Ruth.

"I am not sure but a little toast and some fried potatoes will be more appropriate still," said his mother, handing him his plate. "Latin may not be so good on an empty stomach."

"You are right there, mother dear," returned Rob. "I have tried it a few times, and ought to know. It is just jolly to think there are to be no more lessons for a long while."

"Then you have not fallen so in love with student life that vacation comes near breaking your heart?"

"Not I. But, Uncle Robert, what are we to do this summer? One does not want to stay in the house all the time, and we cannot count in Mr. Meredith now. Is he never going to get well and strong?"

"We all hope so."

"Was n't it splendid for him to serve in that fashion when he had a substitute? He is my hero, after all."

"In spite of his being married?" Uncle Robert asked, with quiet drollery in his voice.

Kathie had glanced up and met Rob's eyes at the conclusion of his sentence, and both thought of the past summer, when his admiration for Mr. Meredith had been unbounded. She, knowing all that had come between, and most of all the great change that would be doing its silent work through the years to come, wondered a little if Rob would find the old charm gone.

Rob colored a trifle. Much as he liked "Miss Jessie," he was not prepared to welcome her very cordially in her new position.

First, after breakfast, he had to make a tour of the house. There was the playroom given over to confusion since Freddy had sole charge, and heroic Firefly in a rather dilapidated condition, looking almost as if he might have been to the wars. But Rob unlocked his workroom door to find everything in a faultless condition. Only yesterday Jane had swept and Kathie dusted and aired until every article and piece of furniture shone.

"I wish I did n't have to go to school," said Freddy, disconsolately.

"I used to wish so myself when I was a small boy," returned Rob, with a twinkle in his eye.

"The best advice I can give you is to put some yeast-powder in your shoes, and see if it will not make you spring up like a gourd,—transform you into a giant in a single night."

"And we have n't been out to the barn!"—in an exceedingly lugubrious tone. "But, O Rob, I have learned to ride Jasper, and I can almost drive both of the horses."

"You are coming on"; and Rob nodded confidentially.

Kathie was ready to take Fred's place. Down to the barn and the stables, round the cottage, stopping to chat with the Morrisons and chirrup to the babies, followed closely by Prince, who had not forgotten his master; then a ramble through the grounds, a look at the flowers, the in-doors adornments, and, behold, it was noon!

After dinner, Rob was off. He made his first call at the Darrells, where every one was delighted to see him. Jessie was busy with some visitors, so he had Mr. Meredith to himself, and a charming talk like the old times. Then he felt free to float round the village promiscuously, and did not get home until almost bedtime.

"Nearly all the school-boys have been here to see you," exclaimed Kathie.

"And I have been to see nearly all of them, it seems to me. It is a jolly thing to come home."

Jolly enough the next day, Saturday, with no school. They had the boat out and went down Guilford River, comparing notes and listening to Rob's stories,—boyish frolics and larks, trenching on the forbidden always, and yet the more exciting for that; found out now and then, to be sure, and punished, but escaping often enough to render it rare fun. Indeed, they all began to consider Rob a kind of hero.

One event he was silent about. Johnny Ludlow's sweet, half-girlish face, with the eyelids kissed down by a mother's tender, despairing love, would be sacred in his memory forever. It was enough that they at home should know what he had endured.

The Academy boys had a grand examination. The graduates acquitted themselves handsomely, and were warmly congratulated. It seemed to Rob that Lu Simonds was more of a "putty face" than ever, with his drawling voice and lazy mo-

tions. How had he been shallow enough ever to accept him for a leader!

Several of the boys came over one morning in great earnest. Dick and two or three others had planned a shooting excursion; and Rob was so fond of the sport.

"I should n't wonder if I had forgotten all about shooting," Rob replied. "I should lose my wager if I tried to hit a mark."

"But you were such a good shot last summer, and liked it so much. Mr. Langdon is going with us, and if you and your uncle would join! We are all so sorry that Mr. Meredith cannot take the tramp. O Mr. Conover!"

Dick Grayson — for he had been spokesman — stepped forward in his frank, earnest fashion.

"We have come to take you by storm, you see. Please don't refuse us," — beseechingly.

"Am I to be carried into captivity?" he asked, smilingly.

"It is a hunting expedition, for the fun, rather than the profit, father declares, — next week sometime, whenever we can all agree. O Rob, you can soon practise up. We will come over and try a target."

"Would you like to go?"

Uncle Robert studied his nephew's face a moment. There was something under the indifference, surely.

"I don't know,—that is, I can't make up my mind so suddenly."

"O Rob! when you are always ready for anything!" and there was an exclamation of surprise and disappointment.

"Well, I will consider," was the rather evasive answer.

"Anyhow, let us have a good practice down by the lake. Did I tell you that I had a little beauty of a gun for my Christmas present? I think it is as handsome as yours."

This gravity was so unlike the enthusiastic Rob that his uncle instantly concluded there was a very good or a very bad reason. Especially when Rob pleaded something else on hand as an excuse for not joining the practice.

"But you *will* go, Mr. Conover?" Dick urged.

"Yes, if Rob cares to join the party," was the pleasant reply, as if he hardly questioned the boy's reluctance.



"O, he will by that time, I know."

"Command me, then"; and, bowing, he left them to their own arguments.

"What is the matter about it, Rob? Is it your mother?"

What an easy thing to fall back upon his mother's fear of fire-arms! But Rob was not cowardly by nature, and the more he saw of it among boys the more he despised it. Yet he had no real right to use his gun, according to the conditions on which he had accepted the gift.

"I can't tell you just how it is, Dick," he replied, frankly. "I don't believe I *can* join the party, but it is no one's fault save my own."

Dick did not press him for any further reason, and the boys strolled down to the lake, their unfailing resource. But Rob was graver than usual.

When he came in to lunch, Uncle Robert made no allusion to the episode. He had a pleasant drive planned with Mr. and Mrs. Meredith, if Rob desired to accompany them.

On their return they stopped for the letters. One for Kathie, three or four for Mr. Meredith, nor was Uncle Robert forgotten.

Mr. Meredith leaned back among the cushions, indolently reading his.

"An invitation for you, Jessie," he said, handing the letter to her. "George's wife wants us to go to Saratoga with them."

•Kathie turned round at that.

"They are coming down to persuade us,—Ada and her mother. A very kind remembrance to you, Kathie, and a brief visit as well."

"And — is n't it odd? — General Mackenzie and his son are coming, if it is convenient."

"A young cadet. Master Rob, you will have to look to your laurels," laughed Mr. Meredith.

Rob colored a little.

"What do you think of the Saratoga project?" asked Jessie, timidly.

"Would you like it? You have never had a real good chance for coming out, you know," and there was a laughing twinkle in his eye. "You have never had a bridal tour or anything — but a sick and decrepit husband. Suppose we take Kathie and make ourselves gorgeous and gay. Is n't it almost time that she was a young woman? I shall not be able to dance much, so you will have

to put me in the background,—a kind of filling in or toning down.”

“But the doctor recommended seaside this morning, you know,” Jessie said. Somehow she did not take very warmly to her sister-in-law’s grandeur.

“Which reminds me, Conover, that I was going to ask you about a place where we might have the ceaseless din of the ocean in our ears, as it would save the expense of keeping a small boy and a jew’s-harp,—where it would n’t be too deadly quiet, nor ultra fashionable, and plenty of good fishing. That is about my only resource. And then if you would all come!”

Rob turned eagerly at that remark.

“There is the shore edge of Connecticut.”

“Martha’s Vineyard and all along shore. But can you put your finger on any particularly picturesque spot?”

“It won’t reach,” returned Uncle Robert, studying his hand.

“We shall have to consider this point,”—folding up the letter. “They are coming next week. Kathie, what about the young cadet? He must be quite a fine fellow by this time.”

Kathie colored daintily.

"I have never seen him, you know."

"But you threw me overboard for the General, you remember. See what a high-sounding title will do! How should I have survived if you had not cast me a crumb of comfort the other way?" and he glanced at Jessie.

Very odd indeed how it had all come about; little links multiplying themselves, a strand of one life braided in with the strands of another! But Jessie never could have guessed, the day she came over to the little cottage and took Kathie and her aunt sleigh-riding, that the best her own future was to hold could be dropped like fairy fleece from the child's hand. And as they glanced at each other now, the girl and the woman, a little smile like a heart-key unlocked the whole storehouse of remembrances.

Then they went on idly in the glow and beauty of the slanting western sun, that seemed to be shooting long arrows of light at stray wood-nymphs who might be hiding in the dusky shadows among maple, beech, and walnut trees.

"There is Long Island," remarked Uncle Robert presently. "I had a little thought of that myself."

"Just it. 'Old Long Island's sea-girt shore.' The great bay and the greater ocean. We will all turn our attention to it."

No more was said at the moment, for the carriage stopped at the Darrells. The young people had not made themselves any new home just yet. Everybody dreaded to have Jessie go away, from grandmother to Charlie; and they had made Mr. Meredith so very welcome, that it seemed more like home than any other place he had ever strayed into.

They dropped the two out and said good by until to-morrow. Then Kathie handed her letter over to Uncle Robert. He smiled a little, reading the quaint and soldier-like phrases.

"If mamma agrees, I think they may as well come next week," he said. "Then we can have our time afterwards."

"Were you really thinking of taking us all away somewhere?" asked Rob.

"Yes. It would make a variety, and give you something new and pleasant to remember, — perhaps help along the next year's studies."

A little prick went straight to Rob's heart, like a sharp thorn. Always thinking of him, of them, of what

would be delightful and profitable, and never minding himself, but finding pleasure in whatever pleased others; the best of his life, the very cream and heart, given to them. And all he asked in return —

Rob winked his eyes hard. Some grains of gray twilight had come between him and the gorgeous gold and scarlet sunset over yonder. He could n't help putting out his hand a little way, till it touched the other hand, lying carelessly, yet with an inviting look, upon the knee.

The fingers closed softly over his. Ah, how comforting the strong, warm clasp had been that night up in the little "den" where he was awaiting fate! It was almost like an angel loosing the bars and bringing him out to freedom. Uncle Robert could always see the clear path through the most tangled way.

Looking at it in the light of honor and truth and honesty, he owed Uncle Robert a confession. Just to keep his word to himself, and suffer the consequences, was not altogether the thing.

But Mrs. Adams was over to dinner, and afterward her husband and her brother dropped in. They had some singing, and a little talk about places that it would be pleasant to visit.

"O Conover," Mr. Langdon said, as they stood by the window, "did Dick Grayson come over this morning with a plan for a small shooting expedition? There is a good deal of fun down on the marshes with snipe. To be away one night only. His father is quite willing if you or I head the party. I am going for my own amusement. You and Rob will surely join? He is just the boy to get wild over such a thing."

"We did not really decide this morning," was the answer. "It is barely possible that there may be some visitors to prevent."

Rob sat on the step outside, leaning his face into the tangle of cool green vines.

To be sure — if the Mackenzies came next week —

He sauntered in to Kathie presently.

"What did mother say about — about the company?" was his rather eager question.

"O, we can be all ready. They are in New York, you see, and I believe General Mackenzie wants to go west somewhere. It would be more convenient for them now."

Rob felt immensely relieved. He need not tell

*just* now. Dick knew there was something in the way, and as for the gun, he did not mean to touch it, honor bright. So he crossed the room afterwards, and entertained Mrs. Adams so well that she said, going home, "What a nice, gentlemanly boy that Robert Alston is! He can make himself very agreeable, and one has only to look at his frank face to put the most implicit confidence in him. Mrs. Alston is to be envied in her children."

If Rob had heard!

So there was no setting straight that night. The next morning Kathie answered her letter, enclosing an invitation from her mother. Then she told Rob about Sarah Strong, and how charming the General had been to her in spite of her plainness and want of style.

Rob became so interested that he proposed driving Kathie to Middleville just for a chance of seeing her *protégés*. Mrs. Alston made no objection. The afternoon was lovely, and there would be a light moon in the evening if they wanted to stay.

Sarah was so glad to get hold of Kathie that she would n't hear of a fashionable call. Then she had so many pretty things to show her, and so much



to tell, while the boys, with the freemasonry common among them, took splendid care of Rob, who really shone among them by virtue of his drollery.

"I want to tell you that I made out beautifully at the examination. Father is just as proud of me as he can be. I am going to school another year, and then — you can't guess — what I mean to do?"

Kathie saw it in her eyes, but she only gave an inquiring little laugh. It was like the child's graceful tact to let Sarah go on with her own confession, rather than chill her by blurting out her precious secret.

"I mean to teach. I have been thinking it all over. You see here are the other girls to grow up and help mother. And then I can always be learning. I like it so much. I have even begun with a little music. It is so nice to know that you are not quite cut off from all the lovely people you admire, but that one thing and another make little bridges over to them. I don't suppose I should ever have known anything about it but for you, only I should always have felt the great hungry want."

Was it knowledge that had so softened and brightened Sarah's face, thrown out the old, uncouth

manner, toned her to a graciousness that was almost like a grave strain in music, or a shadowy light in a picture? And this, like all that had happened between her and Mrs. Meredith, had begun with the simplest of acts. Jessie had given out of her bounty, Kathie gave out of hers, and by and by Sarah would find some one needing the cup of cold water. There was the great world puzzle explained,—just a simple passing of the good things of life to one another.

“They are real splendid, good-hearted people,” declared Rob, “without much refinement. You were plucky last winter, Kathie, though it was not pleasant to be laughed at.”

“No,” and a rift of color tinted Kathie’s face. “But when one is in the right— If Miss Jessie had stayed away from us because we were poor or —”

“We were not the ‘or,’” said Rob, laughing. “But when Miss Ada comes it will not do to invite Miss Strong. Girls can never climb over the fence as easy as boys.”

It was very true, and a pity, Kathie thought. Some of the nicest gardens in the world were all

hedged in, and the only taste of sweetness that ever went abroad was the little whiffs that rose high in the air and floated off.

Rob declared that he had enjoyed himself royally, and that Kathie had the greatest knack of finding out odd people and bringing them up to something delightful.

That night, just before he went to bed, an errand took him to his closet. Over in the corner yonder stood his gun. He could n't resist taking it out, rubbing his fingers softly over the bright steel and silver, and snapping it just the merest trifle. Going off with the boys would be a hundred times better than staying at home with that prig of a cadet. O dear! O dear!

## CHAPTER VII.

## UP TO THE MARK.

THE boys were to start on Tuesday, and on that day the Mackenzies were to come. Mr. Conover could not join them, therefore.

"But you might go, if you liked, Rob," he said.

"No, I don't care to."

Mrs. Alston came round and kissed him.

"I am very glad," she remarked. "I would so much rather have you wait a year or two, until you have a little more judgment. So many accidents are constantly happening."

It was mean to take the kiss and the credit under false pretences. Rob felt a tingle of shame to his very finger-ends. And there were the other clear, kindly eyes he had not met fairly for a week. His secret was like the Old Man of the Sea. It gave him a prick here and there, hung to him, half choked him, and was spoiling everything.

He drummed idly on the window-sill. Kathie

called to him from below, and Prince sprang up his very highest, giving a coaxing, whining cry.

He did not want to go down and have a frolic with the dog, nor play croquet. The brightness and freshness seemed to have gone out of everything.

Uncle Robert was looking over some accounts. Presently he closed the book, sauntered to the window, and passed his hand over his nephew's shoulder.

"What shall we do for amusement?" he asked. "Is vacation growing dull?"

It would come out some time, of that he felt convinced. He could n't go on carrying this burden always, for it grew heavier at every step, and it seemed as if everybody was peering at it with curious eyes, asking what could possibly be done up in such a bundle, that must be kept out of sight.

"It is n't that altogether," he said with a long breath, which somehow refreshed him and gave him courage. "Uncle Robert, I did not give up going with the boys because I—I did not care about it, but I—I have no right to use my gun."

There was a moment or two of silence. Uncle Robert's hand enclosed the round chin with a sort of gentle, loving pressure. "You could not keep your promise, then?" the voice said a little sadly, but in no anger.

"Yes, I think I *could* have—" He was in for the whole truth now, and would not skulk behind any subterfuge. "Honestly, I don't believe I tried. I was not to smoke, you know, until I became a man. Well, the boys had little cigarettes at school, and there was a good deal of fun smoking out of windows and over the fence, as they used to say; that is, in some unnoticed corner of the grounds."

"But smoking was against the rule?"

"Yes. Still, there was ever so much done on the sly. But we were off bounds the first time I tried, and it really did n't seem like smoking,—those little things,—half paper."

"That was not very terrible, to be sure, but not *quite* up to the mark."

"If I had stopped there—" Rob's face was scarlet now. "One Saturday I smoked a real cigar. I believe I never thought until I had it nearly finished. It did not make me a bit sick."

"After that it was very easy to go on."

"Well, I had broken my promise. I felt awfully sorry, too. But I did go on for a while. Then I had a row with two or three of the boys,—that was about five months ago,—and one or two little things set me to thinking. I have not smoked any since."

The story was straightforward and honest, and Uncle Robert felt that it was every word true. He was as sorry as Rob when it came to that, and longed very much to find a good opportunity to excuse him.

"I had not thought of it for a long while: there was all the trouble about Johnny, you know, to take it out of my mind. When Dick spoke of the excursion, it came back fresh enough; but I was ashamed at first to confess that I could not keep a promise like that."

"I am very glad that you had the courage to confess it, though I suspected something of the kind that morning."

"Did you?" Rob was a little surprised.

"Yes. Still I am the more willing to give you credit for bravery now, because I know you might have deceived very easily."

"Uncle Robert, when you gave me the gun, did you think I would earn it fairly?"

"I had sufficient confidence in you to believe that if you did not earn it fairly you would not use it. I counted on the failure of your first experiment in smoking for assistance, though I foresaw there would be some still stronger temptations."

"If it were to happen over again, I think I could keep my word to the letter. I feel differently about some things than I used to, and I have learned to say 'No,' and not be teased or bullied into a 'Yes' afterward."

"Which is some gain, certainly. It is all these things, Rob, that go to make a strong, symmetrical character."

"And yet, Uncle Robert, I can't see where the wrong of smoking is. It certainly *is* pleasant."

"It is one of the expensive and useless habits, and does no especial good, is really no delight to those around us."

"A great many other things are useless."

"Anything that tends to health or happiness, or the pleasure of others, can never be entirely useless. And the purely selfish ones are much more likely



to lead to excess. My great desire for you is to have you arrive at manhood with no confirmed bad habits, and in perfect health. I want your nerves and muscles and brain to be clear and steady. Then you can try the world for yourself."

There was an ideal of splendid manhood in Rob's mind, and yet perhaps not quite so strict as this model. He sighed a little.

"Another puzzle, Rob?"

"I was thinking that it *was* impossible always to be good, at least at school; and some of the boys who manage to keep out of scrapes do mean little acts that I should be ashamed of."

"Temperament has a good deal to do with it. One person has a certain weak strand, another something else. Yours, I believe, is being rather easily persuaded."

"Yet I think I have some firmness."

"You have a good deal, Rob. And I honestly believe that if this temptation of smoking had occurred since Johnny Ludlow's death, you would not have yielded to it."

"I am quite sure of that," he returned, slowly. "You see, when I first went down it was a new

thing, and I could not help getting in with the fellows when there was any fun going on ; but when it came to a square up and down falsehood to save one's self from punishment, I had to stop, and that made some of them angry."

"You have learned to think, my boy, and that is something gained. Altogether your school-year has been very fair."

"You don't know half," exclaimed Rob, coloring afresh.

"Is there anything worse than the follies you have confessed?"

"Nothing as bad, perhaps. Of course I joined in some of the pranks upon Cæsar, but I have always been thankful enough that I did not have a hand in the last one. And, although I bought the powder for one of the boys, I never mistrusted its being put to such a use."

"What do you suppose you went to school for, Rob: to play or to study?"

"I am going into the study next year, strong! Indeed, some of the pranks that I thought great fun at first appear foolish to me now. And the hateful kind of things I never did join."

A little smile played around Uncle Robert's eyes. The boyish folly would work its own cure in time. When the nail was once driven there was no use hammering until the wood all about was bruised. "But you *do* long to join Dick's party," he asked.

Rob turned quickly, with earnest eyes and a bright flush quivering over every feature. "I *do* want to. I can't make myself think that it would not be nice and pleasant. But I am not going to do it, even if you give me leave. Only—there is one thing—"

"Well?" with a tender light in his eyes.

"If you would let me try over again. I will give up all this vacation, if I can start fair after that. And I *will* try. It does not seem to me that I can forget again."

"Very well, Rob, that is a bargain. I am pleased to see you willing to make the sacrifice, and ready to try again. There are a good many failures all through, and it is step by step until we come to the very last of it."

The burthen rolled off. Rob's heart was light again in an instant. He stood on firm ground, with no treacherous rolling stones under his feet. Mr. Lang-

don might come over and discuss the party a dozen times and no great throb would start the blood to his face. And he really did mean to be more careful in the future.

He took Freddy out rowing presently, and in the afternoon had a good long drive with Aunt Ruth. His mother and Uncle Robert sat on the vine-covered porch, talking.

"I don't think you need be afraid, Dora," Uncle Robert said, reassuringly. "I feel that the past year has borne good fruit, and will continue to bear still better. Rob has learned to depend more upon himself, to decide in his own mind whether a thing is right or wrong, and to look a little at the moral evils of wrong-doing. As for larks and tricks and mischief generally, they will exist until the race of boys is extinct. As one grows out of them his mantle seems to fall upon another, and if Rob misses being a pattern boy, I have great hopes of his developing into a fine, manly man."

The boys and Mr. Langdon regretted Rob exceedingly. It gave him a pang to see them go off in such natty trim ; but he was very cheerful about it, and even entered into Kathie's plans. Ada was to

come on Wednesday and stay until the ensuing Tuesday. So they would have croquet parties and sailing parties and rides, and a merry week of it.

But Kathie felt quite abashed when the tall cadet, in his gray uniform, came marching up the walk with an air and step that was almost as "military" as his father. General Mackenzie took both hands in his with a gentle pressure. "My little friend," he said, "this is my son, Robert Bruce. I have told him so much about you all that he feels acquainted already. He and your brother have made friends."

Rob's face expressed a warm admiration that delighted Kathie. One could not always count upon the direction his fancies would take, or rather would *not* take. But this was genuine earnest. Kathie held out her hand frankly.

Bruce smiled in a half-surprised, boyish fashion.

"Do you know," he said, "that I have been picturing you as a very little girl?"

"And so she is," replied his father. "If you like young ladies better, I dare say Master Robert can find a few for you, but Miss Kathie marches under my colors."

She looked very simple and childlike in her white dress, with one frill and a blue sash, while the color kept flitting over her fair face like a bit of sunsetty crimson at the last of daylight.

Mrs. Alston and Aunt Ruth came to welcome their guests. They were a little dusty and travel-stained; so Rob, with unusual courtesy, bethought himself, and carried Bruce off to his own room, where, after the hands and faces were washed, all the boy's traps had to undergo an inspection.

Passing through the hall as they were going to dinner, Rob whispered, "He's a brick, and I like him."

Kathie smiled at the perfect indorsement. So, after the meal, they rambled off together. The General was a little annoyed at this, rather forgetting that boys might be attractive to boys. In fact, Rob was quite wild to hear about West Point and the life there, and enjoyed the jokes and fun that slips into even the most thoroughly guarded life. And the trip Bruce had taken two years before to Michigan was wonderfully entertaining.

The others walked over to the Darrells, it was such a lovely night. Mr. and Mrs. Meredith were delighted to see the General.

Jessie came round to Kathie's side presently. "The doctor was here this morning, and we had a long talk," she said. "He thinks Edward is running down a little, and approves of the seaside by all means. Don't you believe you could coax Aunt Ruthie and the rest to go?"

"How delightful! O, if we could!"

"It would be so much pleasanter to have company, — one's own friends."

"What treason is plotting here?" asked Uncle Robert.

Kathie reached out her hand to bring him within their circle.

"Could n't we all go to Long Island?" she said, very much in earnest. "Rob would like it, I am sure."

"And you will sacrifice yourself for Rob's sake," he returned, laughingly.

"O no, indeed. I want to go as well; that is, if we go anywhere. But I am not tired of Cedarwood" — with a bright light in her eyes.

"I think I could spend a very delightful summer there," said Mrs. Jessie, archly.

"Rob must have a little change, or it would n't

be half a vacation to him ; and I am not sure but the variety might do us all good. We will keep thinking about it until it resolves itself into something. But are you sure you will not regret Saratoga ? ”

Uncle Robert gave Jessie a rather quaint, peculiar look, and then added, before she could reply, “ You would find a great many pleasant and amusing things. It is not all show and outside to every one. Crowds have stray hearts, if you can only get at them. ”

“ It is the getting at them, though. And I believe that I do not like to go very far out of my shell, unless — ” Jessie stopped and colored vividly.

“ Unless you see the green pastures and the singing brooks beyond ? ” Uncle Robert asked, with another peculiar smile.

“ Is n't there something to give as well as to get ? ” said another voice, full and mellow.

“ But I am sure Mrs. Meredith always gives, ” Kathie answered softly, glancing up into the General's eyes.

“ That is as much our duty as the other, you know, though the other is apt to occupy our first thoughts.



And yet the enjoyment we give to those around often returns doubly blest."

"I don't know as one could give very much at Saratoga; at least, a quiet little body like myself," Jessie returned, rather mirthfully.

"Yet I have seen women there who brought a freshness and fragrance into the atmosphere like a new-blown rose. And I once found a little violet in a garden of hot-house flowers." He took Kathie's hand as he said this, and she knew he meant the night of the opera so long ago. "And the best of all was that the violet was n't afraid to give out its sweetness before all the camelias and dahlias and hosts of other stately flowers. But you see, General Mackenzie, we do not want to go to Saratoga. We would rather be sweet somewhere else, — would n't we, Kathie?"

Kathie smiled.

"Well, I shall not over-persuade you into fashionable life. I like the quiet and the simplicity better. But I wonder sometimes if the truest and noblest people do not stand aside or stray off into byways, and let the main paths be filled with the idle and the frivolous."

"But if the strongest duty appears to call us into the by-path?" said Jessie, a little timidly.

"My dear young friend, all the duty does n't lie in the by-ways; and it seems to me there never was a time when good men and good women were more needed in the front ranks. We have just been going through a great struggle that ought to purify our national character, and that is only an aggregate of individuals. I do not want to see the highest places left merely for fashion to fill. Truth and strength and purity ought to be there, not perpetual dressing and dancing and idle compliments."

"It is all very good," Jessie said, softly, to Kathie, when Aunt Ruth and Mr. Meredith had taken the argumentative part off their hands; "but I cannot help confessing that Mrs. George Meredith *does* overpower me. And I am afraid the world in general would think her example better worth following. It is more bright and shining."

Kathie wandered off into a reverie about the doing, on the right hand and on the left. What was the most important? And when one was mixed up in these endless perplexities about dress and fashion and what was just the style, and what was old as the

hills, her small brain grew confused, and she had the feeling of drawing back that Jessie had expressed.

They sang a little presently, and then started homeward. Rob and his young friend sat on the piazza steps, planning to-morrow's pleasures. A long sail down the river, some fishing, and —

"Rob," his uncle said, in a little aside, as they were dispersing for the night, "do not fill up the time too completely with boyish amusements. Miss Ada will expect some attention, and the Mackenzies are old friends of her family."

"Girls are always such a nuisance!" Rob declared, when he was out of his uncle's hearing.

An odd smile crossed the face of his companion.

"I suppose *we* consider them something of a luxury," he returned. "When you have nothing but boys and men nearly the whole year round, lady visitors seem quite a treat. And I have never had mother or sister since I could remember."

Something in the tone made Rob silent.

"Boys who have homes and everything don't know what it is to be without," Bruce Mackenzie said. "And money will not buy all the highest and finest joys of life."

It seemed to Rob that he could buy about all he wanted with money. To be sure, mother and Aunt Ruth and Kathie were very nice, but then his mother *did* feel inclined to make a girl-boy of him, and he wondered just a little whether Aunt Ruth would ever be a queer old maid; and Kathie — of course it was nice to have them all.

So the next morning the boys were off betimes. For the rest it was rather a quiet day, though the General appeared to enjoy it exceedingly. Kathie listened as he and Aunt Ruth talked over subjects that she seemed growing up to, that would soon indeed clamor for admittance into her daily life; and she felt as if she were lingering on shady, fragrant banks a little while before the real journey began. There was something more to it than the pleasure to be enjoyed.

"I suppose," her mother said, late in the afternoon, "that we ought to do something to enliven Ada's visit. Would n't it be nice to ask some of the larger girls over to tea and to play croquet?"

"Yes," Kathie answered, much interested.

"They were very kind to you that winter in the city, and, as there are no young girls at the Dar-

rells, it will make a pleasant variety for Ada to come here."

"When shall it be, mamma? And I think the boys ought to take us out one day. Rob promised."

"Saturday afternoon would be very good for the party here; you would have a little rest then by Sunday, at least more than if you were out all day," Mrs. Alston returned.

"How many would it take to make a nice party, mamma?"

"There will be Dick and Charlie and our two boys,"—a sweet motherly smile taking in Bruce, that he would have been delighted to see,—"so you will want two more girls, at least."

"Emma Lauriston and Sue Coleman."

"Mr. Langdon would enjoy it very much, but then we ought to find another young lady."

"Lottie Thorne would like to come very much. And, O mamma, there are ever so many that it would be delightful to ask in her stead."

"Yes, but whether the others would be as happy? We want to choose guests who can fraternize with Ada, as the company will be mostly for her entertainment."

It was very true. Annie and Lucy Gardiner would be as shy as mice under such auspices, and Mary Cox would say little smart things in ridicule of Ada's "fine airs." Kathie understood with the wise tact one always gains in studying the pleasure of others.

"There are several of the larger girls who were in school, but it seems as if I did not get very well acquainted with them.

"Perhaps we had better have Lottie," Mrs. Alston decided, slowly. They had been compelled to decline several invitations to the Thornes latterly, and this would prove that there had been no feeling in it.

Kathie told the boys their plans that evening.

"Well," returned Rob, "if we must take you out rowing it may as well be to-morrow afternoon. Get all your girls together."

"You are not compelled to," answered Kathie, a little hurt by the careless tone.

"O Miss Kathie, it will be a great pleasure to me," exclaimed the young cadet. "I would like to go and call on Miss Meredith with you to-morrow morning, though I have not seen her in two years, and then she was quite a little girl."

"She is a fine lady now," Rob rejoined.

"He is n't a bit fond of girls, is he, Miss Kathie?" and Bruce laughed. "If he had to go live out on the frontier he would find the difference."

"Robinson Crusoe always was his ideal," Kathie said, gayly.

"And all you want is a man Friday."

Then Bruce Mackenzie glanced up at Kathie, and wondered why it was that some one else had always to find out how nice and sweet boys' sisters were!

## CHAPTER VIII.

## WITH THE GIRLS.

BRUCE MACKENZIE went to drive with Kathie the next morning in the pony-carriage. Rob started off to look after the boys, and learn what kind of a time they had, while the elders remained at home.

Kathie felt quite shy with the young cadet upon her hands, for somehow they had not made much of an acquaintance as yet. Kathie was very different from most of the young girls he had met. All the nice things about her came so natural that he felt any idle complimenting would spoil the fine grace.

It was a soft, sunshiny morning; that is, little drifts of white fleece went drifting about the blue, now and then crossing the sun, but merely toning the golden light, not hiding it. The night's dew had freshened everything, and the trees shook out a delicate summer morning fragrance.

Bruce was quite gallant and used to making himself agreeable. So he opened a conversation without



much difficulty, and before Kathie knew it she was in the midst of an animated description of the draft, and how Uncle Robert had been saved from going.

"I envied all the men," Bruce said. "If father would have consented, I should have thrown up everything and gone."

Kathie thought he looked very soldier-like as he said that. And some day he would be a soldier.

As if divining her thoughts, he said, "There never will be such a glorious time to distinguish one's self again. A little frontier work will be all that remains by the time I am through."

"But you would not want another war?" Kathie said, deprecatingly.

"Not on my especial account. That would be hardly fair. So I must reconcile myself to being a peace soldier."

It reminded Kathie of the other fighting they used to talk about last year. Had the peace soldiering any significance to him?

"Turn down this street," she said, quietly.

"Brookside is quite a town, is n't it? though the prettiest part of it is at your end. This street seems to divide the beautiful from the every-day, — common.

She used to live away over the hill there,— would he think her common if she were still in the little cottage? A rift of color fluttered over her fair face.

“And yet I don’t believe we could get along without the common,” she said, earnestly. “There is a good deal that is nice in it, as well.”

He looked puzzled, as if he was not sure he held a clew to her sentence, which seemed to have some hidden meaning.

“Hillo!” exclaimed a cheerful voice.

“O Charlie!”

Charlie’s face was scarlet. He was so used to seeing Uncle Robert with Kathie that he hardly thought of any one else. But Kathie introduced her friend at once.

“Ada was wondering if you meant to come over,” he said. She will be glad to see you. Let me fasten the horses, and walk right in.”

Kathie caught a glimpse of Ada at the parlor window, and ushered her companion within. The first glance showed her that Ada waited to be introduced; but when she had said “Miss Meredith,” the young cadet took Ada’s hand, with a polite bow. “We were quite good friends two years ago,” he said,

cordially, "and though we have both grown considerably, I hope it has not been out of each other's remembrance."

Ada thought that quite an elegant speech. She motioned him to a seat upon the sofa, kissed Kathie, and drew her on the other side to a chair.

"I suppose they are all well at Cedarwood this morning? Is n't it lovely? Just the morning for a drive. I declare, I quite envy you. I was wondering if you would deign to look in upon me and break up my deadly monotony."

"It cannot have been very deadly since only last night," said the cadet, with a laugh.

"O, I think Brookside an intolerably stupid place under the most favorable circumstances," Ada exclaimed, with an airy toss of the head.

"I have not found it so. And, as for scenery, it is a perfect little nest among the hills."

"I do not complain of the scenery," Ada returned, rather more graciously. "Only there is nothing going on. I wonder everybody does n't fall asleep."

"We thought we would have something going on," Kathie said, good-naturedly. "A little croquet and

tea-party on Saturday afternoon, and I believe the boys want to take us out rowing."

"If they will go late in the afternoon I would not mind, but nothing would tempt me to broil my face in the summer sunshine."

Kathie colored a trifle. Bruce could not help thinking that the sunshine had not spoiled her complexion. But Ada was quite a young lady in comparison with Kathie. Indeed, she had grown rapidly during the year, and prided herself no little upon her delicacy and slender figure, her soft white hands, and small feet.

"We will try and have the time suit," the cadet made answer.

"And who is coming to the tea-party,—all Brookside? I dare say you have found out by this time that Kathie's parties include the lame, the halt, and the blind," Ada said, with a rather sharp laugh which deepened Kathie's flush.

"Rob and I have had the parties, I believe," he answered.

"The difficulty of a place like this is, that you can't draw lines easily," Ada went on, twisting the tassels of her white morning dress. "One knows

everybody from their cradle upwards, and you feel duty bound to ask in Aunt Jemima and all the cousins every time you have a friend."

"I like those old-fashioned country people," Bruce exclaimed, with a thorough heartiness. "Though I thought you were all very — stylish"; and he colored this time.

"Stylish!" Ada repeated, with a peculiar inflection.

"If you do not mind a few moments, I should like to see Mr. and Mrs. Meredith," Kathie said, rising.

"O, we will excuse you"; and Ada nodded with alacrity, delighted at the idea of having the young cadet to herself. She had become quite an adept in the art of entertaining young gentlemen.

Kathie exchanged a few words with Jessie and her husband. Would they come over on Saturday afternoon?

Mr. Meredith promised. Then he put on a rueful countenance. "I don't know but what we shall have to go to Saratoga after all," he said, disconsolately. "It is the one thing needful, a kind of outside polish."

Kathie somehow did not seem much alarmed.

Just as she had finished her call Mrs. George came into the room with the stateliness of a queen, and kissed Kathie graciously. But what made it so different from Jessie's caresses, or the Darrells? A great awe stole over Kathie. Would she ever dare be as brave as on that memorable night when she had refused to sing?

Ada and Bruce were in the midst of an animated chat, but when he saw that Kathie hesitated a little about sitting down, he rose gallantly, and asked if the time was up.

"I think we must go, but —" Kathie hesitated. If he would rather stay here with Ada, *she* was willing to excuse him from any further attention. Only, how to put it into words and not seem impolite.

"It is too bad," Ada declared, as if she were just ready to cry. "And I am to be left here all alone! If your carriage was a little larger I should invite myself."

"O," exclaimed Bruce, "if Miss Kathie is willing, you might take my place. She drives beautifully."

"Indeed, I will not deprive you of the pleasure."

I will be heroic, and stay at home." For the cadet was her chief attraction.

"Would there not be room?" ventured Bruce.

"If Ada will —"

Kathie was n't quite sure whether she wanted her or not. The crumpling of her dress in being crowded she did not mind a bit, but there would be an end to the pleasant talk that had gone on before, and that might be taken up again when they were in the wide "out-door" of the world.

"You are a darling," declared Ada, as she ran to change her dress. But when she returned, Kathie glanced at her in a little dismay, for the ruffles and puffs and ends and furbelows stood out in every direction.

The seat of the pony-carriage was quite wide, three had ridden thereon many times, but there was seldom so much dress to stow away.

"I will take the middle," Ada said; so she was handed in very courteously. Kathie settled herself and her unstarched piqué, whose wrinkles always shook out. Ada spread her ample adornments over the plain double skirt, and sat forward a little, her shoulder right in front of Kathie's face, and

the brim of her hat hiding the cadet quite effectually.

“Which way, Miss Kathie?”

Kathie gave the required direction. Ada began to expatiate eloquently upon the beauties of the day, the waving trees, and the birds flying across the sky, just like reading it out of a book, Kathie thought. Was she so fond of nature's pictures? There was a beautiful prospect from Mr. Darrels, as the house stood upon a ridge of the hill, and yet Ada had seen nothing from those windows.

Kathie asked Bruce to turn, and presently to stop. Ada drew up her eyebrows a little.

“This old fashioned farm-house?” she said. “Why, it looks as if Noah's grandmother had lived in it.”

Bruce smiled a little, but before he could make the slightest move Kathie sprang out and ran up the old-fashioned door-yard, with its border of carnation pinks, feverfew, with its white nodding heads, and hosts of “everlasting” daisies in white, red, and deep crimson.

Grandmother Lauriston welcomed her very cordially. Emma was up in her room, so Kathie, after a few pleasant words, mounted the stairs.



"I saw you through the blind," Emma said, kissing her tenderly. "And who is that fine young fellow and the elaborately gotten up young lady?"

"Ada Meredith, you remember, and that is General Mackenzie's son."

"O, has he come?"

"Yes, and we want you over Saturday to tea. Come good and early, for we are to have croquet before, and after too, if any one wishes it. A pleasant party, I hope. I shall invite Sue Coleman."

"Quite a young ladies' party. Yes, I will come, to see General Mackenzie, if nothing else."

"It is mostly for Ada," Kathie said, frankly.

"Sue has some cousins staying with her. I was up there yesterday. They are full of fun, too. O, Fred is coming home soon. I had a letter a few days ago."

Kathie was very glad to hear. "But I must n't stop," she said, "they are waiting for me."

Ada was in no hurry. Bruce was telling her what times they had with visitors at West Point. So Kathie might have stayed in the ark a full half-hour without being missed.

The Coleman mansion was modern and stylish,

with a winding drive. A group was out on the lawn studying a chess-board, under the shadow of a great sycamore. Bruce drove in and halted.

"You little midget!" exclaimed Sue, taking Kathie in her arms. "Why, I did not look for you under all those ruffles! And a young -- soldier, too! I am afraid you are not a devoted peace-at-any-price woman, when you carry around such handsome cadets to aggravate us poor girls. Can't you introduce me? I am almost dying. If that girl is n't his sister I shall try to cut her out."

Sue uttered this in a laughing breath, which was half whisper.

"I want you to see them, and -- to come over on Saturday."

Ada held her head loftily, ready to be condescending if it was required of her. The cadet's dark, bright eyes wandered to the tree and the chess-board.

Kathie came forward and introduced her friends.

"O," Sue exclaimed, holding out her hand to Bruce, "I have met your father, and that makes us half acquainted, does n't it? Won't you please stop a little while? Kathie and I have an end-

less sight of talking to do, and I am sure the ponies want a rest. You can fasten them — here”; and Sue audaciously led them by the check-rein to the hitching-post.

“We can’t stop, can we, Kathie?” said Ada, in a tone which meant that she did n’t want to.

“O yes, it will be a rest, after being crowded up. Besides, I want you to see my cousins. Lou Ros-siter is here too.”

Bruce sprang out; he was rather glad of the opportunity, for his limbs felt a little cramped. Then he reached up his hand to Ada, and they two came bringing up the rear, after Kathie had spoken to Lou, one of the school young ladies, and been introduced to Frank and Leonard Randolph.

Lou and Leonard had the chess-board between them. Bruce glanced it over; “A pretty tight game,” he commented.

“They mean to fight it out on that line all summer,” declared Sue. “Frank and I have been watching as forlornly as Fatima’s sisters, only we were never asked if we saw anything.”

Leonard Randolph was about eighteen, with a little touch of fiery Southern blood in his eyes,



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hair, and complexion. His sister was some two years younger, and quite pretty.

Ada held rather aloof until she saw that the conversation was getting on very rapidly without her, and she was determined not to be lost sight of. They all seemed to plunge into a gay little badinage at once.

Sue strayed to the outside of the ring with Kathie's hand in hers. "What was it about Saturday?" she asked.

Kathie explained the purpose of the little company.

"Who else are you going to invite,—if it is n't 'imperance'?"

"Only Emma and Dick Grayson and Charlie, and Mr. Langdon will be in—"

"And *I* think Mr. Langdon splendid. Croquet and supper and dancing, and a nice time generally, for you always have so many nice people at your house. How *do* you find them all?"

"They just come along," said Kathie.

"And I would like to come along above all things, but how can I? It never would do to leave my cousins. They have been here a week, and I have invited everybody in, I believe, and done my best,

but, being new-comers, we have not such a host of resources — ”

“ Could n’t you bring them ? ”

“ Might I ? ” exclaimed Sue, joyfully. “ I would like to, ever so much. Cedarwood is so beautiful. And you are the most hospitable little body in the world, only I want you to be quite frank about it. If you think it would answer to have us all — ”

“ I am sure that it would. We wanted a little company to entertain Ada.”

“ And the more the merrier. We shall be sure to come, and much obliged in the bargain.”

There was something else in Sue’s face that seemed to be longing to find its way out. A little quiver on her lips shaped to some words that it was difficult to utter.

Lou Rossiter had been one of the most rampant of the patricians last winter, though she treated Kathie very cordially now. By one of those odd impulses, Kathie glanced at her and then at Sue, whose face flushed scarlet.

“ I can never forget,” she said, in a hurried whisper, “ how hateful we all were to you, except Emma. But yours was the true patrician blood after all, and you heap coals of fire upon our heads.”

Presently they turned to go, but Sue would not hear a word. Lunch was to be ready in about ten minutes, and stay they must. In her laughing manner she overruled every objection. Somehow she felt as if she wanted Kathie to partake of her hospitality *first*, and so wipe out the old score.

A very pretty lunch it was. Even Ada's fastidious taste could find no fault with the adornments or the dishes, and the serving was quite equal to that of their trained waiters.

When they were seated in the carriage again, Kathie had some doubts about their course. It really appeared as if Ada desired to go to Cedarwood to finish up the day. After a while Kathie summoned courage and asked her.

"I might as well," she said, as if conferring a favor. "Mamma will know that I am safe."

Mrs. Alston had been wondering a little what kept Kathie so long. So she had the whole morning's adventure to tell over.

"I do not believe we will need Lottie now," Kathie said, yet a little sorry to leave her out, since she would enjoy it so well.

"We will remember her for the next one, then," her mother answered, with a smile.



Rob took possession of Bruce. The other gentlemen were out, so Ada proposed that they should go up stairs and have a good rest. In truth, she was tired. Her dress fitted her beautifully,—almost as tight as the skin, but it made her ache around the waist. Her exquisite French kid boots pinched a little, and her head drooped with its pads and braids and cushions and rolls. Aunt Ruth really pitied her. So she found a dressing sacque and some slippers, and told Ada she would be so much fresher for the evening if she would rest in them for the next hour, or, indeed, lie down.

“I will sit in this easy-chair, thank you. I am sure I never could get my hair up in any shape alone. Marie, mamma’s maid, always does it for me.”

Aunt Ruth sighed over the poor victim of fashion, beginning her tiresome round of worldly observances so soon. Kathie washed the dust off of her face and was bright as a rose again. She brought her little work-basket and sat down by the window with a strip of embroidery in her hand. Aunt Ruth left them alone.

Ada shut her eyes for a while and drew several  
• restful breaths.

"We are dreadfully disappointed in Uncle Edward's marriage," she said presently, with the severe air of a person fully competent to pass judgment upon so weighty a matter. "Aunt Jessie has no style whatever. The little beauty she possesses can be turned to no account, for she really does not know how to make the best of it."

Kathie flushed deeply, but was silent. How could she best defend one so good and true, one who had a higher motive to her life than Ada or Ada's mother.

"Mamma desires to take her to Saratoga, — she has never been anywhere, you know. For if Uncle Edward should be well enough to return to the city next winter they will want to go into society, and it would be exceedingly awkward to have so much of the country clinging about one."

"I am sure they admired her very much at Doctor Markham's," Kathie said, bravely. "And Mrs. Havens thought her very — lovely."

"But Mrs. Havens is no authority, and they are as old-fashioned as the hills at Doctor Markham's," was Ada's decisive answer.

Kathie thought of the past winter, how Jessie had watched and prayed over her sick husband, and

nursed him back to life. And in those times when death appeared so near, it was well to have better and holier thoughts than whether one was stylish and fashionable.

"And it is a shame for him to poke down in this little country place forever, papa said so. He has changed so much since his marriage. It was a very unfortunate thing."

Kathie felt in some strange way partly responsible for it. Her heart beat with warmth and indignation, and her first impulse was to make an earnest defence. But Ada was her guest, and under any circumstances convincing her must be a hopeless task. God could see all the right and beauty of it, and He had led Mr. Meredith away from the frivolities to a joy more constant and satisfying. She could not explain it to any one, but she could feel and understand with her child's heart how sweet the life really was, and how they two were growing into each other's souls. Since they were happy, what did it matter? and so the tangles and knots were smoothed out of the perplexed brain.

"We expect to have a lovely time at Saratoga," Ada went on, not relishing her companion's silence,

and fancying that she had rather extinguished her. "I wish you could see my dresses. We have had a dressmaker a whole month, and I have some of the most beautiful organdies you ever saw, and two train dresses. I had to coax mamma a long while for them, though Mrs. Forbes said girls who danced a good deal really did not need them. And I mean to dance. I went to several elegant parties last winter."

Kathie glanced out of the window where the sun was shimmering over the green lawn and dropping through the tree-branches with tender, shadowy glooms. The broad, beautiful life without, getting nearer and nearer to God at every turn, fair, open, pleasant ways, and this worldly ambition within. If Ada could but see!

Listening to the low warbling of the birds and tender murmur of the winds, the talk ceased to ruffle the peaceful current of her soul. Ada's world and hers would always be different, but dear Jessie was in hers. And so Ada might gossip on unheeded.

But when she heard the voices on the porch below she crowded herself into her exquisite boots, and

dress that fitted to a thread. Kathie merely smoothed her shining hair, changed her dress for one of thinner material, and tied her simple sash.

General Mackenzie glanced them both over, the fresh little girl with her soulful eyes, and the premature woman full of worldly airs and graces already. What a contrast! Five years from this time Kathie would have blossomed into pure and serene womanhood, while Ada would be faded, wrecked in health, temper, and perhaps happiness.

Mr. Meredith came over in the evening and found his niece in high feather entertaining three young gentlemen. No trace of weariness was visible now.

Ada had to cap her triumph with an arrow. "You need not have asked all that raft to meet me on Saturday," she said. "I hate promiscuous crowds."

## CHAPTER IX.

## A SATURDAY PARTY.

ADA had coaxed Dick and Bruce Mackenzie to come over the next afternoon. As it was not to be "anything of a company," she did not consider it necessary to ask Kathie, and she had no special fancy for Rob. He was altogether too plain and honest for her taste, lacking the easy, agreeable tact of Dick, and the society polish that Bruce had already acquired.

Bruce was rather surprised when he found how the matter stood.

"If you promised to go on Ada's account, you had better, then," Rob returned, considerably vexed, and with that he marched down the walk.

Then Bruce entreated Kathie.

"She did n't say anything to me about it," Kathie made answer. "I think she meant it just for a social little call, and I am sure it will be very pleasant. I would rather have you go."

Bruce brushed his hair, put on clean cuffs, and

hung around in a most undecided manner. Presently Kathie pinned a rose on the breast of his coat, and said, "Tell Ada to come early to-morrow afternoon, for I think we shall have a nice time."

Thus armed, Bruce turned away with a reluctant step. Ada had been very sweet and fascinating yesterday, but after all he did n't care so much for a *tête-à-tête* with her.

"Why did you send him away?" asked a grave voice.

Kathie colored and glanced up to the wide balcony. General Mackenzie was snugly ensconced in the vine-covered corner, holding a book in his hand.

"As the young men have gone their ways, suppose you come up here and entertain an old man, my dear."

Kathie would much rather have run away and hidden her burning cheeks out of sight; but she conquered her bashfulness and went slowly up the steps.

"Yes, why did you send him away. You *could* have kept him very easily."

Kathie was a little puzzled, perhaps distressed. Did he think she ought to have interfered?

"It would not have been quite right or fair," she said slowly.

"But Bruce was your guest. Was it right or lady-like to invite him without asking you?"

"It was only for a call," she returned, rather hesitatingly. There was a great deal of loyalty in Kathie's nature, and she did not want to blame Ada.

"I saw the whole scene yesterday," the General said, with a half-amused twinkle in his eye. "I felt quite sure that I understood it then. Bruce will have to learn to distinguish between the sparkle of gilt and the steady light of pure gold, and perhaps there is nothing like experience for this. Ada is quite a little miniature woman of the world. No wonder we feel anxious for our sons when we see the daughters of others growing up to mere outside embellishments, and neglecting the inner life,—the soul; becoming false lights to lead the unwary astray."

"Ada's position and surroundings are so very different," Kathie said, apologetically.

"And training and beliefs and aims and desires, when you come to that. It is the old story. We



cannot plant thistles and gather grapes. But about the fruit at the last — ”

Yes, there was the last of it all,—the condition attached to every human life. Not merely the summer at Saratoga, but all the after-summings when fruit should grow and ripen for the harvest home. Would it be love, meekness, tenderness, charity,—in honor preferring one another? Or — “inasmuch as ye did it not unto the least of these.”

“Is it too grave for a little girl like you?” he went on kindly. “Yet it seems as if some armor was necessary when the warfare begins in very youth, and temptations are on every side. Though you appear to have discovered many of the pleasant ways.”

“I have had mamma and Aunt Ruth,” she said.

“And have learned that the brightest grace, the sweetest smiles, and finest culture belong to the every-day living, not the occasional company seasons, just as the Lord God makes the world beautiful always, and does not save his rarest gifts for a holiday.”

Kathie’s eyes grew very tender and luminous.

“I am glad to find one little girl taking hold of the right end. It is the power and the sweetness

that flows right out of the heart, not the bark of fine dressing and fine manners put on the outside, that will cause the branches to grow. But where did we start from? You see I don't make a very good parson,—I wander from my text."

"But then you find new ones," said Kathie, smiling, and secretly hoping that he would not go back to the very first.

He did, though, after a moment's beating about to see where he had left it.

"Yes," he resumed half reflectively, "it was quite right to send Bruce about his duty, but beyond and above any care for the boy, I was glad to see you free from jealousy,—that's just the word. It is such a frightful shadow to spring up beside any one, and sends out such ugly grasping tendrils that one can hardly be thankful enough not to have it growing in one's soul. And now, my dear, let us take a walk down the shady paths. My book had grown a little tiresome before you came."

In the first turn they found Rob, rather disconsolate. If General Mackenzie had seen the figure through the openings of the shrubbery, he kept it to himself; but between him and Kathie they had Rob as gay as a lark in ten minutes.

Kathie's party resolved itself into a kind of general company, after all; that is, Mrs. Meredith came over with Jessie and her husband, and quite monopolized the General. Frank Randolph and Sue were very bright and entertaining. Ada really had to look well to her laurels. She could not command all the attention, and soon found that if she retired in disdain the others would hardly miss her.

They had a merry time over their croquet, and when the interest began to flag a little, Bruce asked Frank to play a game of chess, and Mr. Langdon dared Sue to try checkers. Ada and Dick rambled around a little, and Kathie sat between Jessie and Mr. Meredith on a rustic bench, since her guests were going on satisfactorily.

"The conspiracy begins to work," exclaimed Mr. Meredith, with a droll light in his eye. "I have written to a friend of mine to send me all the particulars of several places. Jessie is afraid to take up the rôle of a grand lady."

"O Edward!" Jessie said, deprecatingly.

"Is n't it so? I would not mind joining a nice, quiet party, but I say let us keep out of the jam by all means. This trip will cost George a round

sum, and be very bad for Ada. Indeed, she is quiet ruined now. The idea of such a life for a child! Thank Heaven, Kathie's mother has better sense."

"It seems very sad to me," Jessie said. "It is just like taking the heart out of a rosebud."

"And scorching the outer leaves to make them curl. So between both there will be nothing left."

"We shock Kathie, I know," returned Jessie. "It seems disloyal to discuss one's friends or relatives."

"I wonder how much disloyalty there is in an honest truth? It is not necessary to say rude or unkind things to people's faces, neither need we do it when their backs are turned. And we can soften the truth, but is it right to soften it away altogether?"

"We need not say anything."

"Ah, but there's the rub. We *want* to say something. And I can never feel thankful enough that Ada has influenced Kathie so little. You know, Kathie, she was my pet niece, and at first I had an idea that you two girls might be very charming friends. Perhaps I have come to look at matters in a different light myself. I feel in all truth and sincerity, that if this should be the last year of

my life I should not want to fritter away six weeks in fashionable dissipation ; and I am sorry enough to see Ada cast into it heart and soul. It is a fiery furnace in which there seldom comes a fourth man, an angel of the Lord. So we will try to keep Kathie fresh and pure."

Jessie drew her close to her heart, and the child understood with that mixture of love and reverence and romance that a very young girl is apt to have for one older, who does not hold herself too far aloof.

"We can't help being a good deal happier with some people than with others," she said impulsively, as if to smooth over the possible rough place.

"True enough," and Mr. Meredith laughed. "And though we are commanded to do good unto all men, the household of faith is specially commended."

"But the others often seem to need the good the most. The puzzle is how to get at them."

"You and Kathie will have to cipher it out some day, for I do believe it is our business to get at them if we can."

Truth to tell, Jessie had been quite tried by her sister-in-law's importunity, and rather free criticisms.

By virtue of her right as an acknowledged leader of fashion, she considered her hints and precepts as quite a mine of wealth to the simple country girl.

Before coming down to Brookside she had discussed Edward's wife with her most intimate friend, while Ada was being fitted by the dressmaker.

"Not that she is positively plain, but there is n't a bit of style about her. She has always lived in a little country town, and never learned how to make the best of herself. So I concluded that it would be a real charity to take her to Saratoga this summer and get a little of the rusticity rubbed off. They will want to live in town next winter, and — since they *are* married, I should be sorry to have him feel ashamed of her. But if he only *had* married that elegant Miss Pennington, and with her fortune too."

"It was too unfortunate," sighed the friend.

"I shall have to bring her up here a week or so to shop and get ready. It will be a great task, but I would do it cheerfully for Edward's sake."

There had been one brief visit to the city, but that was when Edward was still an invalid, and Jessie declined to leave him for other company. The

Merediths were all kind and cordial, but she felt the little something magnetizing the air.

Mrs. George sailed down triumphantly in rich and elegant plumage, and was positively vexed to find her benevolent intentions frustrated. Edward took all the blame upon himself, — he did not feel well enough for gayety, he was still lame and could not dance, and he and Jessie had resolved *not* to go very deeply into dissipation.

"It will be necessary for your wife to have a little polish before you introduce her to *your* friends," Mrs. George said, pointedly.

"I married to suit myself, not my friends," he returned, in a rather dry tone. "It is *my* life, and I have come to think a little more seriously of it than I used."

Mrs. Meredith could not forbear expressing her deep disappointment to Ada, as she had no husband at hand.

"It is such a misfortune that your uncle ever fell in with this set. They are good enough people, but dreadfully commonplace and prudish, — quite Uncle Markham's kind. But if they are resolved not to accept this opportunity they will never have an-

other one through me"; with a decided bend of the head.

The Darrells lived in an old-fashioned, low-ceiled, roomy country-house, with a great deal of beauty scattered about, old and new interlacing like the fresh growth of evergreens against last year's foliage. But Mrs. Meredith was forced to admit that they were modern and elegant at Cedarwood. Mrs. Alston was refined and polished, as if she had only yesterday stepped from the very centre of society. Aunt Ruth was lady-like and full of ease, and the young people were in no wise objectionable. Indeed, Miss Lauriston was elegant, and the Randolphs belonged to an old Virginia family. Clearly Cedarwood was not to be put under a shadow by any grace of hers.

The supper-table was lovely, with its profusion of flowers and dishes of scarlet berries lighting up the snow-white of damask cloth and pure china. Ada managed to secure the cadet, and had Mr. Langdon on her other hand, who was Miss Lauriston's attendant. Sue was droll and irrepressible, and made herself as fascinating as possible to Uncle Robert.

Afterward there was conversation and music, and



presently dancing. Ada declared quadrilles stupid to the last degree, and went to waltzing with the young cadet. Then she expatiated upon the German and some mazourkas that were the most fascinating things in the world. She could dance them all night.

"We have had a lovely time," declared Sue, as she was swinging her hat by the elastic, preparatory to putting it on. "Your cadet is splendid, and his father is magnificent. Can't you make a surprise-party and come up, every one, even to Mr. Langdon? Say Tuesday evening?"

"My friend Ada is going back to the city on Tuesday morning."

"How sad!" with a comical expression in her eyes. "Do you suppose she *will* take the cadet?"

Kathie laughed in spite of herself.

"There is no great loss without some small gain, and I will prepare myself for a good flirtation."

Frank and Leonard were equally anxious. Rob had asked Leonard to go out in his boat on Monday.

"He is like the spider made famous in song," laughed Dick. "He has an invitation always ready, — will you walk into my parlor?"

"He does n't look as if he would eat a fellow up, though," said Leonard.

The Merediths went home in the carriage, so there was no special attendant for Ada. Mr. Langdon had asked permission to escort Miss Emma home, while Dick and Rob and Bruce walked with Sue and her cousin, — for exercise, they said.

"You have had a very pleasant, enjoyable time," General Mackenzie remarked, after they were gone. "And, Mrs. Alston, you deserve an especial compliment for not overloading your beautiful tea-table. It was like a picture. I wish it could have been put in chromo."

"Aunt Ruth arranged the flowers," Kathie exclaimed.

She looked like a flower herself, so simply and naturally beautiful, and her smile and flush might have been that of a young girl. General Mackenzie studied her for a moment or two. "If girls and women could see themselves," he thought, "and understand that a fresh, well-kept soul, and a pure, true face, are more attractive than such a multitude of outward adornments, how much lovelier they might all be."

But Ada leaned back in the carriage, tired and achy, and congratulated herself that she had been

so much more elegantly dressed than any girl in the room. "They must all have seen it," inwardly commented Miss Vanity.

So Mrs. Meredith and her daughter returned home, spared the bother of fitting out "Edward's wife." The young people had a good time again at Sue Coleman's.

"I do believe," Sue said, in a private aside to Emma, "that Kathie Alston has more aristocratic friends than all the rest of us put together. What dunces we were last winter! I am beginning to think there is something more than mere outside to it all,—a bit of true pleasure that goes down to the very depths of one's soul, a shaking out of the crumbs of happiness to others. It may be a queer complaint, like measles or mumps, and I do believe I have caught a little bit from you or Kathie. I had the oddest and gravest talk with Mr. Langdon the other evening, you can hardly think. Has there been a kind of old-fashioned revival, or is it one of the qualities that come with age and experience?"

"There," said Mr. Meredith, walking into the library one morning, when they were all resting up after their dissipation, or because the boys had "seen

everything," "there are three offers for you, so take your choice. Elegant blue-fishing, superb bathing, and magnificent sea-breezes. Adjectives are exhausted. Eloquence is at an end."

Rob sprang up and came round by the table. They had all been discussing this plan. General Mackenzie promised to join them for a week or ten days. Rob was all impatience to have it come about.

His uncle looked the letters over.

"You see, at the hotel we could have rooms together, if we chose to be cramped, but I incline to this old farm-house. There are three large rooms at our disposal, and two could be obtained near by. But it is like a pig in a poke if you can't see it. I have half a mind to run down and stay one night reconnoitring."

"It would be a tiresome journey for you ; suppose I take it myself ?"

"But it would not be quite convenient, would it ?"

"We will try to excuse him for forty-eight hours, or less, as the case may be," responded General Mackenzie, with friendly heartiness. "I promise to be head of the house."

"Thank you. I believe I will go, Meredith, and see what the place looks like. There are a number of advantages enumerated."

Rob waylaid his uncle afterward.

"I suppose I could n't go with you?" he said, wistfully.

"It would not be quite polite to Bruce, would it?"

"I don't believe he would care. He is off with Kathie and that Miss Coleman half the time."

Rob did not particularly enjoy having a rival, and he could not understand why any one wanted to be "hanging round after the girls." But now that Bruce's first strangeness had worn off he began to develop a great fondness for indoors and feminine interests. He talked to Aunt Ruth an hour at a time, and a peculiar nearness that could hardly be explained sprang up between them.

There had never been any home for him since he could remember. First, and a long while at that, it had been boarding-school, with vacations spent in frontier barracks occasionally, but oftener in some little country place where every one was strange. His father had taken him whenever it was convenient, and loved him with a deep and fervent

affection. These little reunions had been the bright spots in the boy's life.

But Cedarwood was different from any place he had ever known. A tenderness seemed always brooding in the air, there was no fretting, very little jarring upon one another, and a sweet readiness for any duty as well as any pleasure. Even Rob had been on his "good behavior" so long that the garment was losing its stiffness, and the angularities cropped out less frequently than in the old days. But he had not quite attained the grace of being second, of seeing another preferred. So when Bruce turned to Kathie and Aunt Ruth, Rob felt as if he might be excused from his duty as host.

He studied his uncle's face now, to see if there were any signs of relenting.

"He would n't care a bit, I know."

"But would you not care? I really think you have some duty in it."

Rob drew his brows into a little frown, and bit his lip to keep from saying anything ungentlemanly.

"I want you to do your best, my boy. The whole duty does not end with enlisting. There is a good deal of steady marching along in the ranks."

The impatient expression died away and one of seriousness came in its place. Yes, that was it,—small daily duties, step by step, and then to think of the million of steps that must go before any great battle, any true endeavor.

“It is better,” he said, cheerfully. “I suppose it would n’t look well, even if there was no special discourtesy in it.”

Uncle Robert smiled, glad to see him decide the matter so readily for himself when there was a sacrifice in it. And having once resolved, Rob was very cheery about it, and delighted his mother by one or two touches of thoughtfulness.

## CHAPTER X.

## NEW PLEASURES.

UNCLE ROBERT returned with a very fair account. There were some vacancies at the hotel in the small seaside village, but he thought the cottages much to be preferred. The three rooms at one were large and pleasant, overlooking the bay, while on the lower floor there was an old-fashioned parlor to which they would be quite welcome, as the family made little use of it. The people in the house opposite were willing to let three rooms, when the matter came to be talked over, but they were not as large. There was a delightful breeze from the bay and the ocean over beyond, Fire Island with its tall lighthouse in sight, and numerous little dots of land covered with waving grass. Fishing parties went out every day, beach parties, bathing parties, and there were chowder dinners, and picnicking in various forms.

Rob was delighted with the account. Bruce too became quite enthusiastic. His holiday was passing



rapidly, and he was very desirous of crowding into it all the enjoyment he could. "For when you have ten months of drill and duty and hard study, it is nice to feast yourself upon pleasant memories of the past," he said.

"It may be hard work," Rob returned, "but I think I would rather like it."

"O, I do not dislike it; but the rest is delightful, for all that."

"It seems to me that it can't be half as tiresome as a regular school."

Bruce smiled a little.

The elders meanwhile talked over the arrangements. The smaller cottage would answer for the Alstons, who, after all, might not remain longer than a fortnight. One room in the other would be at General Mackenzie's disposal, which he accepted gladly. Kathie pulled out her last summer's travelling gear, but found it outgrown. However, she had a new bathing suit, and the rest could soon be put in order.

There seemed to be quite a dispersion of the "girls." Mrs. Coleman was going to Lake George and would take the two Randolph cousins with Sue, Lou

Rossiter was going to Saratoga, and even Annie and Lucy Gardiner expected to visit an aunt who lived among the mountains not far from the Delaware Water Gap. Kathie went round one morning to say good by to her intimate personal friends.

Emma kept her quite a long while. "I shall be so sorry not to see your bright little face every few days," she said. "Why, there will be scarcely any one left! And Fred is not coming home, after all."

"Why?" asked Kathie.

"He thinks he can earn considerable money by staying, and it will make it easier for him another year. It seems too bad not to be able to help him now, when I shall have so much by and by. I do believe I would be willing to paint pictures for sale, if I could make any money for him."

"Uncle Robert thinks him very brave and earnest," Kathie said, with girlish enthusiasm.

"So he is,—dear Fred. And I ought to be happy at home, even if I am alone."

Emma kissed her half a dozen times, and begged her to enjoy everything double for her.

Kathie went home in a rather thoughtful mood.

After she had told her mother the different plans, she was silent a long while.

"My little girl seems to be in a kind of brown study," Mrs. Alston said, at length.

"O mamma, I was thinking — " and there Kathie paused in a flush of embarrassment.

"Well?" her mother continued, encouragingly.

"Mamma, if we could — if I might ask somebody to go with us! She could sleep with me, too."

"Who is the new claimant?" and her mother smiled.

"If we could take Emma Lauriston! She would enjoy it so much, and it is very lonesome for her with no summer pleasures, and not even Fred. She was so good to me last winter in school."

"Emma is a very nice, lady-like girl."

"Would it seem strange, mamma?"

"Strange? In what way?"

"Why, it would n't be because she was poor, or sick, but just for the pleasure. And Mr. Meredith likes her ever so much."

"We all do. I do not know as there is any objection. I will see what Aunt Ruth and Uncle Robert say."

Uncle Robert assented very readily. "I am glad to have Kathie think of these things," he returned. "I want to see her quite as willing to give pleasure as to receive it. And Emma will make a delightful companion for her."

Aunt Ruth went with her to give the invitation, and to make all necessary explanations to old Mrs. Lauriston.

"Why, she might have gone as well as not," said grandmother, who was hard of hearing and talked very loud; "but she sent twenty dollars to Fred last week. Her grandfather told her there was n't any need of it."

Emma blushed crimson.

"It will be just the same as if we asked her to stay at our house," said Aunt Ruth. "Kathie wishes it for her especial pleasure, and as she is the only one of the party rather companionless, it will be a favor to her. We shall all like it very much."

"I don't know whether I ought to go or not," Emma replied, hesitatingly. "It would be delightful, and then I so seldom have an opportunity to go away."

They persuaded grandmother, and after that it was

not difficult to get Emma's consent. Aunt Ruth promised to help her make a pretty bathing costume if she would bring her materials over to Cedarwood, and she finally decided to do so the next day.

"I don't see how you came to think of me," she said softly to Kathie. "I believe you *are* always studying the pleasure of others."

They started on Tuesday morning. Rob rather considered it a day lost, but Mrs. Alston would not spend even a part of Sunday in packing, and they had to get off very early. Jane Maybin was to have a holiday, and Hannah was to sleep at the Morrison's, with whom she was great friends. Freddy was to board with them while the family were away. So they all went off with hosts of good wishes. It was a rather roundabout journey, with steam and horse-cars, and ferry-boats, and, last of all, a stage ride.

Rob's countenance fell a little at the narrow, sandy road, bordered by scrubby oaks and pines, with here and there a clearing that had burned over in some past fire, leaving charred trunks standing.

"This does n't look very seaside-y," he said.

"We will come to that presently," returned Mr. Meredith.

"But how funny it looks! — almost as if we were out of the world."

The scenery changed a little by and by, was broken by clumps of statelier trees and scattering houses. They passed one Bohemian settlement, where the fields seemed in a promising condition, and men and women were working side by side in their quaint peasant garb. Then quite a village opened before them.

"Cap'en Bennet's, I s'pose you mean," said the driver. "There's several families of the same name round here."

"Yes, I believe he was called Captain."

"There's a sight of them round, — own fishing craft mostly, or go oystering."

Rob and Bruce smiled a little at the ambiguous sentence.

There was a hint of grand old sea music and a flavor of crisp saltiness in the air. Both boys snuffed it eagerly. Rob uttered an exclamation. They were on a slight elevation, and, though half a mile from the shore-edge, could see the broad bay, the narrow strip of beach between and the lighthouse at the farther point, and the long stretch of utter barrenness.

"This is the place."

It stood with the end to the bay, though the house was nearly square, with a great roof that sloped gently to the overhanging eaves; at one side quite a thicket of trees and a rather straggling garden, and in front some forty feet of grass, with a row of old-fashioned flowers bordering the clean flagged walk. Not an uninviting place by any means.

"I am thankful for a place to stop and rest," declared Mr. Meredith; and he did look weary.

"This is n't our house, though," said Kathie.

"No matter. You can come in and see how you like mine."

"That just beyond is to be our habitation. Driver, part of the trunks are to go over to Mr. Green's. We will follow presently."

With that Mr. Conover sprang out. They were all delighted with their freedom, for the ride had been warm and dusty. They drew long, restful breaths of the delicious breeze, and settled to a comfortable home feeling at once.

One large trunk and sundry bags came off. Mrs. Bennet appeared at the door, — a pleasant, middle-aged, motherly woman, in a clean calico dress and ample white apron.

Mr. Conover headed the party, and introduced them one by one.

"I almost wish we were going to stay here," Kathie whispered. "It looks so clean and nice."

"You may have the privilege of visiting us," Mr. Meredith answered, laughingly.

Worthy Mrs. Bennet looked dismayed, but the matter was soon explained. They all went up to take a view of the rooms. Airy and neat they certainly were.

"I really begin to experience some compunctions of conscience," declared the General. "It seems as if you ladies should be over here in these delightful quarters."

"But there would be four of us," said Mrs. Alston. "There are two rooms, however."

"Why did n't we make that arrangement?" and Jessie glanced up very much as if she wished it.

"But you want a sitting-room," Aunt Ruth said to her. "Your convenience must be studied first."

"I should n't mind a bit. The room is so large we can sit all over. I wish you would go over and see your apartments, and, if you do not like them as well, come back."



"Would Mrs. Green be willing, I wonder?"

The General insisted. Mr. Meredith dropped into a chintz-covered easy-chair, too tired to stir, he said; but he desired Jessie to go over with them, and the party was marshalled to Mrs. Green's by Mr. Conover.

There was quite a difference in the appearance of the two women, although they were sisters. Mrs. Green was tall and thin, but there was a sharp, shrewd, yet not unpleasant, twinkle in her eye, which betokened much spirit and ability to understand a little fun.

"We are not going to take you by storm, although it may look like it," said Mr. Conover. "We have just arrived, and thought we would take a glance at our new abode."

"O, walk in, walk in. Glad to see you all so well and hearty. Letty, bring some chairs from the other room. This is my daughter."

Letty courtesied. She was a bright, rollicking-looking girl of fifteen, with cheeks like a rose.

"Sit down," continued Mrs. Green. "You must be tired enough after your journey. It has been a warm day too. Jim, if you don't quit making that

dog howl, I will tell your father to take it away again. Boys are so trying. I have three of them."

Then some one besides the dog set up a howl. Mrs. Green flew to the door.

"Alec, come in this minute. Go round to the kitchen and stay there. Jim, take that dog out to the barn. Strange, if any one ever comes there must always be bedlam! *Do sit down.*"

Mrs. Green was growing rather red in the face, and began to fan herself vigorously with the corner of her apron.

"If you would be kind enough to show us our rooms first," said Mrs. Alston, pleasantly.

"O, certain, certain! I told the gentleman — Mr. Conover — that I'd do my best, but if you've been through Sister Rhody's house you'll feel rather discouraged, I'm afraid. I thought I would n't mind taking two or three boarders, but —"

Two of the rooms did very well, though they were not of the same size, but the third was undeniably small.

"We could manage well enough here," declared the General, "and you would be more comfortable over at Mrs. Bennet's. I really shall insist upon the change."

They sat down by the window and discussed the point awhile. The gentlemen were all very willing.

"We should have a jolly good time," said Rob. "We could borrow Jim's dog occasionally."

Mrs. Alston began to explain the case to Mrs. Green in a quiet and rather apologizing way.

"O law!" she said, "if you 'd like, do it. Rhody's house is nicer than mine, but I ain't a bit jealous. I always said that Rhody deserved the best of everything. You see she was quite along in life when she married Cap'n Bennet, but she took the best of care of father and poor old Granny Stevens, who was a master sight o' trouble. Granny left her all she had, and I do say I never begrudged a penny. It was tough earned, every dollar of it. And I do think you ladies 'll like it better over there. Then I've been used to men folks all my life. I had the queerest old gentleman boarding here last summer, — between you and I, he was a little cracked, and says he, 'Mrs. Green,' says he, 'I'm coming down here to board every summer as long as I live.' But, poor man, he died last winter."

The fanning recommenced. Rob was going through

with a pantomime that made Emma's risibles quiver a little.

"Then, if it will not make any difference, —"

"O dear, no! Suit yourself. I really do think Sister Rhody 'll like it better. I 'll make the gentlemen as comfortable as I can."

So it was decided. They marched back to Mrs. Bennet's and gained her consent, another trunk was brought up, — they had not all come from the station yet, — the ladies began to divest themselves of their travelling gear and think of clean faces.

"We may as well go and take possession," said General Mackenzie.

"You may expect us back after supper," announced Uncle Robert. "We shall be anxious to see you by that time."

Emma and Kathie were to share the same room. It had a high closet and a large, old-fashioned bureau in it; so they distributed their clothes about, Kathie declared, in single-file fashion.

They had barely made themselves presentable when the supper-bell rang. There were no gentlemen save Mr. Meredith, Captain Bennet being away. But at the foot of the table sat Cousin Wealthy, a

rather airy spinster of forty perhaps, much betrimmed and beruffled, the aristocrat dressmaker of the place, "who *could* live on her interest money if she chose," but she thought laziness as much of a sin as anything else, and did n't mean to have to answer for it!

Her thin light hair was frizzed, and her chignon was of the most massive structure. Her eyes were very light, with a kind of faded-out look, and she shut her thin lips with an expression that she meant for a smile, but was only a smirk. But underneath this crust of vanity there was a kindly heart, when you happened to touch it.

They adjourned to the parlor afterwards, and Mr. Meredith took possession of the rather stiff sofa. Mrs. Bennet insisted that he should have a pillow, and he was very comfortably ensconced by the time the others came to make their evening call.

"It is jolly enough," said Rob. "Letty is sharp, I tell you, and pretty too. Her cousin John owns a splendid row-boat, and she goes out in it,—all alone sometimes. She goes over to the beach often. And Fire Island is n't any island at all."

"What is it then?" asked Kathie, in surprise.

"Well, it is just the point of that strip of beach. It must be fun to run up to the very top."

Kathie inquired if Bruce thought he should like the place.

"Not as well as Cedarwood," he said, with a little smile. "I shall expect to find you homesick soon."

"When are we going out bathing?—in a grand crowd, I mean?" asked Rob.

"With the whole bay for our bath-room," added Kathie.

The elders meanwhile decided that the change was admirable. The first thing to-morrow would be the bathing, of course, though Mr. Meredith declared he felt better already. Then they must look up some horses and a boat,—but Rob had privately made up his mind that he would see Cousin John's first of all.

"How odd it seems without Uncle Robert!" Kathie said. "And to be away from our own lovely home —"

There she fell into a reverie. This was not like

their last summer's brief excursion, for, being on land, it had a kind of stability about it; but there was the murmur of the ocean, and the suggestive breeze that almost made a sailor of her again.

"Do you think you shall like it?" she asked of Emma.

"O, I am sure I shall. And I mean to do some pictures in India ink."

"I wish they had a piano. And what a funny little woman that Miss Wealthy is! I thought Rob would have a convulsion when she was talking. Is n't that breeze beautiful? I am just as sleepy as I can be."

They said their prayers and kissed each other good night, climbing into the high, old-fashioned bed.

"It was so kind in you to ask me to come" were Emma's last words.

The girls were up betimes. They heard the music of fishermen's calls out on the bay, and the sharp cry of seabirds, and there was newness in the very atmosphere. Aunt Ruth was fresh and bright, Mr. Meredith had slept well, the breakfast was most appetizing, and they were quite prepared to enjoy

the day. The two gentlemen came over together, for the boys had sallied out on a voyage of discovery.

"I thought the first thing on the programme was the bathing," Mr. Meredith said.

Jessie decided that she did n't care to go this morning. Aunt Ruth and Mrs. Alston were similarly disinclined, and the party narrowed down to Mr. Meredith and the General. Emma and Kathie thought they would like to walk down to the bay, as Guilford River and the lake at home had heretofore been their most extensive sea-views.

Uncle Robert meanwhile was to go up to the village and see what arrangements he could make for having a carriage every afternoon. So they all started on their respective errands.

The morning was quite warm already, in spite of the freshening sea-breeze. The two girls trudged through the sandy walk with their broad sun-hats drawn down over their eyes.

"We ought to have brought some of the beautiful Cedarwood trees," said Emma, laughingly. "For these scanty pines blown awry are not altogether umbrageous."



After one slight turn the road down to the bay was straight enough, and the only objects that varied the way were two or three small, rusty, weather-beaten cottages with scanty gardens.

"It looks so odd," said Kathie, "after all the shade and greenness at home. But the bay *is* beautiful. Why, it looks like an ocean! That little strip of sand is the beach, I suppose; and, O, there is the lighthouse!"

The far hollow of the sky was like a broad blue arch, and the waves gave back the azure tint. It was very smooth now, with but little wind, and each small billow was crested with the least touch of foam, just sufficient to define it. On the island side there were several points of land jutting out, with here and there a boat or bathing house. A few fishermen were out, and occasionally a sloop or a yacht seemed to float along, almost becalmed, or a flock of birds went skimming through the air.

"A lovely still-life picture," Emma said, slowly. "It is like a dream or a poem—"

At that moment a shout reached them. Turning, they saw the boys rowing as if for a wager.

"Hillo! Ahoy there!" came with an accompanying laugh, and Bruce gallantly waved his hat.

They ran down to the shore.

"So you see we have found a boat," Rob began, in triumph. "Won't you take a sail?"

Kathie glanced at Emma.

"Where are the others?" asked Rob. "I thought you were all going to make mermaidens of yourselves this morning! We have had lots of fun already. Letty is a case! I tried to coax her out with us, but I believe she had to stay at home and wash dishes. I am glad that I am not a girl! Hooray! Come on board."

"How can we?" said Kathie, looking longingly into the boat.

True enough. There was no dock at hand.

Bruce spied the trunk of a tree that had been cast ashore for some unknown purpose,—perhaps to serve their turn.

"If you will walk down to that log, I think we can take you on board," he said.

Rob pushed the boat about with his oar, and, after getting aground a time or two, succeeded in bringing her alongside of the log.

"Now, are you sure-footed —"

"Or web-footed?" interrupted Rob, with a laugh.

"Because, you see, if you fall off, you might have to swim for your lives."

Bruce sprang out and balanced himself with ease, holding out one hand.

"Now if you will venture, — you are not afraid, I know, Miss Kathie. No, don't look down at the water, — the movement might make you a little dizzy. Quick — there!"

Kathie took a dozen rapid steps, clasped the strong hand, and was safe in the boat in a trice.

"You came down like a seventy-four," said Rob. "Suppose you had swamped us!"

"I should fancy you swamped already in the sand," she returned, good-humoredly.

"Now Miss Lauriston," said the cadet.

"That was achieved triumphantly," declared Rob, and as he pushed off he began to spout: —

"Once more upon the waters, yet once more,  
And the waves bound beneath me —"

"Shall I make the gestures?" asked Bruce with a quiet smile.

"As if I was n't gesturing with the oars, for the further instruction of the fishes in the sublime art of elocution," was the gay reply.

## CHAPTER XI.

## LAYING PLANS.

THEY skimmed along beautifully, the crisp breeze blowing Kathie's curls out like a golden streamer. They all talked at once, comparing Mrs. Green and Mrs. Bennet, Cousin Wealthy and Letty, but when they came to boys, Emma declared Rob and Bruce had the advantage of them.

"You will be dismally lonesome," commented Rob. "But I am coming over to see that old maid."

"Don't, Rob," said Kathie, softly.

Rob flushed as he glanced up, remembering in the old days that he had once had a fight about Aunt Ruth. So he gave two or three quick strokes as a vent to the touch of feeling.

"It is quite odd that we have nearly all the feminine element over at our house," Emma remarked.

"Where is Uncle Robert?"

Kathie explained.

"Was n't I lucky to get a boat so soon? It belongs to Letty's cousin, John Hawkins. I mean to hire it for the season, providing we stay that long. He has a cat-boat too, and we are going out blue-fishing."

"I suppose a cat-boat is n't anything more like a catbird, than a blue-fish is like a bluebird," said Kathie with the least little bit of drollery.

"I don't know about that. -A cat-boat has wings, and can fly."

"Wings?" repeated Emma, in surprise.

"Yes, though they are not covered with feathers, exactly," said Bruce.

"O, sails! But what a funny name for a boat!"

"Rob believes in being extremely nautical," his companion rejoined.

"Well, that is the name of it. Most of all I want Uncle Robert to take us down to the lighthouse. And I wish, among other things, that we could see a shark."

"A shark!" echoed Kathie, incredulously.

"Yes. They have been up in the bay, and out beyond the bar there are plenty of them."

"I hope we won't meet with one now," said Kathie, rather timidly.

Rob laughed. "O, you need n't be afraid. One could not swallow the boat and all. Is n't this just royal? Silver Lake is nothing to it."

"But Silver Lake is very beautiful, with the overhanging trees and the clustering lilies," said Bruce, softly. "It seems to me that I should weary of this after a while."

Kathie's eyes met his with a sweet appreciative glance. She felt that no spot in the world could be quite as dear or quite as lovely as Cedarwood.

"I feel as if I were out on the ocean already," remarked Emma, with a vague look at the distant sea line where cloud and water met. The summer sun was fast turning both to the white tint of intense heat.

They rowed along and touched several small points. A fish-factory, for one thing, that was not very fragrant just now, so the girls begged to turn back.

As they were against tide now, Bruce took up his oars. "It is growing too hot for comfort," he said. "Early morning or near sundown is best in such a sweltering glare. Won't you girls have a headache?"

Emma thought not. And Kathie declared that she and headache were very distant acquaintances. However, they hurried back, stopping this time at a small wharf, where Rob fastened the boat securely. Then the young gentlemen walked up to Mrs. Bennet's.

The rest of the party had disposed themselves on the shady piazza with rocking-chairs, camp-stools, books, and sewing. Mr. Meredith had been reading aloud, but, reaching the end of a chapter, closed his book. "Young people, give an account of yourselves," he began.

"O Kathie, you have ruined your complexion," said Mrs. Meredith, in a mock-serious manner, looking as if she were greatly distressed.

"I guess the red will come out of it," was the child's reply, as she glanced up archly.

Rob and Bruce had quite a story to tell. Then the little brass clock in the parlor struck twelve. It was a queer thing in the way it rattled off the hours, as if it had so much to get through with that it could hardly strike at all, but did it as an immense favor, and then hurried back to its ticking.

Kathie and Emma went up stairs to wash their faces. They were a good deal burned, it must be confessed, but Emma said they would sleep off the worst of it.

Uncle Robert had secured a large carriage, that would hold six, for their afternoon driving. But that would not accommodate all, so they were in quite a quandary to know what to do. Kathie and Emma offered to stay at home and take their turn the next day, and before they had finished their plans Mrs. Bennet came out.

"Young people," she said, "I have just received an invitation for you. Cousin Wealthy has been over to one of our neighbors to-day, and happened to mention that you were here, and Mrs. Holland wants you to come over to take tea and play croquet."

They glanced at each other in comic dismay.

"You need n't mind being strangers a bit. The Hollands are just as sociable as they can be. Mary is married, but she is young as anybody, and Hattie is about fifteen, and there is a cousin from Fireplace. You will have a nice time, I know, and they will be glad enough. Then Cousin Wealthy will be there to see that everything goes straight."



Mrs. Bennet looked as if she had quite set her heart upon it. What were they to do ?

“It is a humbug!” said Rob, in a low, decisive tone.

Bruce spoke up. “I will go if the rest of you will,” he exclaimed, cordially.

“But it is so odd. And we don’t know any of them except Miss — Miss Wealthy,” wondering a little whether that was her Christian or family name ; and Emma turned to Kathie.

“O, you will get acquainted in a few minutes. They have a piano, too. Mrs. Holland sent the man over here with instructions to bring you back without fail.”

“I think you had better,” said Mrs. Alston, quietly.

That decided it. The girls went to get ready at once. Emma’s toilet was not much more complicated than Kathie’s. She had not come into a sufficiently large share of her fortune to admit of purchasing much finery, but then, on the other hand, she always looked elegant in anything. She could tie a bow equal to a French milliner, and a cluster of rose-buds at her throat was as pretty as an expensive brooch.

The walk was not long. Rob was seized with a fit of boyish, ungracious shyness that made him

almost cross. "I don't see what they wanted to ask us for. The girls might have gone."

"But every one has a little social life to put into the general fund," returned Bruce; "and when it comes right in one's way —"

He paused, remembering that this great boy was not Kathie. They had ventured into several very pleasant talks latterly.

"It does n't come in my way. I am pushed into it, or dragged, or something. Girl parties are either shallow or stupid."

The curves grew deeper around Bruce's mouth, under the suggestive shading of his upper lip. A quaint half-smile and a touch of longing that he could be in Rob's place, instead of the lonely niche he occupied in the great world.

Mrs. Holland and Cousin Wealthy came down the walk to meet them. She introduced the company with much tossing of the head and flying of ribbons, and a manner that she fully believed had an extra touch of polish in it. Afterward, Mrs. Thorpe and Miss Hattie were announced, and the cousin from Fireplace, — Miss Bolton.

"Next thing you will discover andirons and a

tinder-box, and perhaps shovel and tongs," whispered Rob, falling in the rear.

The Holland ladies were undeniably cordial in a warm, whole-hearted way, that, if it had not attained the highest degree of culture, was free from any coarseness or ill-breeding. Even Rob was not long proof against it. By the time they were half through their first game they felt as if they had known each other a month at the least. Then a rather portly gentleman came walking out towards them. His hair was grizzled and his beard was grizzled, and sun and wind had so tanned him in his young days that he could safely defy them now.

"My father," said Mrs. Thorpe to Rob, pausing before she struck her ball.

They had it down at the other end of the ground now, so Rob could talk a little. This hearty, wholesome face attracted him at once.

"Enjoying yourselves, I see," nodding his head in a pleased fashion. "Nothing like it for young folks, or old folks either, when you come to that! Keeps them from sitting in the chimney-corner and groaning. But this thing puzzles me. I never could get the hang of it. I used to be a great fellow for base ball forty years ago."

Rob's heart was touched. He and Mrs. Thorpe were carrying all before them, and when Rob was on the winning side he did n't give up easily; but he managed to run back for a little snatch of talk, and explained to Mr. Holland that they had only come down yesterday, but had been out on the bay rowing. They meant to see everything, of course; the light-house, the beach, the ocean, the fishing, and all.

Just as their game was finished the supper-bell rang. Rob managed to get seated at Mr. Holland's end of the table, so there should be no time lost. Miss Wealthy devoted herself to the young cadet, nodding her head at every word, and setting curls and streamers in violent agitation. Rob declared that he could repeat every word she uttered, and regaled Bruce at bedtime with sundry high-flown, unintelligible speeches in this wise:—

“My dear young friend, it inevitably follows as a self-sustaining corollary, that a system of non-negative impressions can only be disintegrated by a process of spontaneous and intuitive abstraction, and in this speculative era the mind and judgment can only be modified by a course of extraneous and illusory perception which will enable us to

reach the true solution of this great philosophical enigma."

But he must have listened with one ear only, for he was very much interested in Mr. Holland's talk about blue-fishing.

"Mother," he exclaimed, "Griffin will be back to-morrow, won't he? We must get up a party, I think, for these young gentlemen. Griffin knows all about it, you see, the best places to go and just what you want. Let me consider—" bending his head a little on one side, as if listening as well as thinking. "Johnny Hawkins has a capital good boat. How many are there of you all told?"

"Three more gentlemen," said Rob, believing honestly enough that ladies were of small importance to any regular fishing party.

"I shall have to come over and see you to-morrow morning and get acquainted. It will only be neighborly. You will stay quite a spell, I suppose?"

"I don't know how long," Rob answered, dubiously, secretly hoping in his heart that the Merediths would consider it the place of all others for them.

They did not go out to croquet after supper. Emma very obligingly played and sang, and Bruce

joined her. Miss Wealthy was in a gush of delight.

True to his word, Mr. Holland walked over the next morning, making them a rather early call, and had to wait for the bathers to come in. General Mackenzie and Mr. Conover were much pleased with the old gentleman's heartiness and cordiality. He had already seen John Hawkins. They could have the boat to-morrow, if they wanted it, but John could not go. However, Griffin would be home, and he could manage it just as well. He had been on the water all his life.

"What shall we want?" said Rob. "I have oceans of fish-hooks."

"You need a squid for blue-fishing."

Rob had neglected his education on that point. A squid was rather new to him, and all he could think of in this direction was 'a bob for eels.

"Can't we make one?"

"I have several over at the house, but they may want brightening up. Let us see what sort of fishing tackle you have."

Rob brought down a great parcel. Hooks, leads, lines, — in fact everything, — and several elegant rods.

"We can manage well enough. I have made many a one. Griffin will be home at noon, and I guess, if you are all agreed, we might start early to-morrow morning."

They all did agree. According to arrangement, Griffin made his appearance immediately after dinner. A fine, bronzed, sailor-looking fellow, of six or eight and twenty, nephew of Mr. Holland, by name Griffin King, and outside of his own family familiarly termed Captain.

The attraction was mutual. They were not long in coming to an agreement.

"There 's some squids," exclaimed Mr. Holland.

Rob inspected them. A piece of lead with a rather large hook let in as it was cast or melted. •

"You see, when you troll, you let this run along the water by the boat's side, so"; and Mr. Holland made an explanatory motion.

"What do you have for bait?"

"Nothing. The fish see the glitter of that and snap at it."

"Foolish little fish," commented Kathie, pityingly. Mr. Holland laughed.

"They are not over wise, to be sure. But sometimes

a fish pulls so hard that he breaks the line and runs off with the squid. I have caught them with a squid inside."

That amused Rob a good deal.

"Some of your hooks will do. I have plenty of lead over at the house, and if you liked we might make several more."

Rob and Bruce were delighted. Just as they were ready to start, the feminine portion of the Hollands came to call upon the ladies, expressing great pleasure at having already met the younger members of the party.

Mrs. Bennet insisted upon their remaining to supper, and they had a very enjoyable time, although, to Miss Hattie's disappointment, both boys stayed and took tea with her father.

Uncle Robert had brought a croquet set along, so that the girls might have something to amuse themselves with while the others were away. He had finished putting it up that afternoon. Mr. Meredith teased Jessie a little about her prospective loneliness.

"We will not allow them to triumph over us altogether," declared Mrs. Thorpe. "Next week we will



try and get up a beach party, or go down to Fire Island."

"What is a beach party like?" asked Kathie.

"O, you go out in a yacht generally, in true picnic fashion, taking your provisions along. Over on the beach you have dinner, varied sometimes by broiled fish or chowder, or a clam-bake. You take your bathing-suit and have a run in and out of the surf. Or we go down to the hotel and order a dinner, and have some music and dancing."

"Can't we try the first-named party next week?" was Mr. Meredith's inquiry.

"You see he is not going to be satisfied with his own pleasures," said Jessie, laughingly. "He wants to share ours."

"We will consider the case if he is very well behaved," Mrs. Thorpe returned.

"Kathie, I leave my cause in your hands, remember that. If I am not included in this beach party I will look out for the largest shark that I can find, and—"

"Fight it out on that line," said Kathie, demurely.

"With a harpoon."

"And bring home a barrel of whale-oil as prize-money."

"And set up a museum of high art with his backbone."

"I am afraid you are laughing at my possible misfortunes," Mr. Meredith said, with a grave shake of the head.

Rob came home in high spirits, with three new, shiny squids and a burnt thumb, where a little rivulet of hot lead had trickled over it.

"There is nothing so good for burns as brown soap," said Miss Wealthy, in so practical a manner that Rob stared.

"On account of the reflex action of the cellular tissues, I suppose," he said, gravely, while Bruce turned his head to keep from laughing.

"I will get you some immediately," she returned; and Rob submitted to the plaster with due resignation, wearing it as far as his bedroom door, declaring that he should sleep at the rate of ten knots an hour, and be up with the first peep of dawn.

## CHAPTER XII.

## BLUE-FISHING.

CAPTAIN KING and Mr. Holland were down before them, though, stowing away eatables and drinkables, turning the cushions right side up, to make them clean and attractive, sweeping away the sand and fragments with a stubby broom, and putting the place in order generally. The morning was a trifle cloudy, but the wind was fresh, so they knew that it would blow off presently.

Rob swallowed his breakfast and rushed over with Jim Green at his heels, for Jim was quite elated at being chosen to accompany them. Bruce followed more at his leisure, and hoped in his secret heart that there would be time for a brief talk with the girls about the next party. He reached the house just as they were through breakfast.

The three elders were in easy and comfortable costume, with large straw hats to shield them from the sun. Rob gave a sigh for his last summer's jaunty sailor suit, now, alas ! outgrown.

"Ahoy, messmate!" sang out a cheery voice, and Rob ran down the walk to meet Mr. Holland.

"I knew you must be waiting," he declared, regretfully, as if half the morning had been taken out of his life.

"There is plenty of time, youngster, as you will find in the course of forty or fifty years. Good morning, General; good morning, ladies, the very top of it to you. It will be a nice day for a stroll on the beach, with those gray clouds overhead."

"Do you think it will storm?" asked Mrs. Meredith, anxiously.

"Not a bit of it, ma'am. Don't you be worrying now, for we may not be home until quite late; but we will bring fish enough to stock a market, and all the folks safe and sound, high and dry."

Mrs. Bennet had put up a hamper of provisions for lunch, or in case they should be cast ashore upon some deserted island, Kathie said merrily. The ladies walked down to the beach to see them off.

Rob sprang on board and inspected the boat from stem to stern. It was pretty broad, with seats around the outer edge, the centre being reserved for the "cargo." They stored away their traps, Rob taking

great care that no untoward accident should befall his wonderful squid. The good-bys were said two or three times over, and away they went, with wind and tide in their favor. The fresh air, full of sea flavor, seemed to stir every pulse. They pushed out to the middle of the bay, where the little towns and villages that dotted the shore were visible, but had a miniature make-believe look.

Uncle Robert and Mr. Meredith enjoyed the sail wonderfully; on and on in the brisk breeze, until the lighthouse loomed up before them.

"Oh! are you actually going out to sea?" asked Rob, his face in a glow of delight.

"Why, to be sure."

"That is just royal."

"We mean to have the best of everything to-day."

"But when do we begin to fish?"

"Any time you like."

"Well, I would like to just this moment."

"Begin, then," was the ready answer.

With that Mr. Holland disentangled the lines and showed Rob how to manage his. The rapid motion of the boat made it look not unlike a glittering fish itself as it was drawn through the water. But Rob

somehow felt a little incredulous as to anything, even in the waters beneath, biting at a bare hook.

The rest decided to try as well. Rob secretly hoped to astonish them all by the first bite; but, alas! Mr. Meredith was the lucky man, without the slightest effort.

Bruce held his line idly, and let his eyes wander out to the ocean beyond, throwing up its silvery foam and then running far out as if to meet some tardy vessel. Out here the peninsula ended, or seemed to be broken into numerous islands covered with coarse, rank grass, that looked green and lovely as the breeze made long windrows in it. Here were signs of busy life. Sloops, schooners, sail-boats, and fishing-vessels dotted the water, groups of people were pacing the firm beach in front of the hotel, and pleasure parties were out in every direction.

"Don't get aground," said Mr. Holland.

"Trust me for that."

"Where could you get aground?" asked Rob.

"On the bar. It runs down from the island and up from the beach, leaving only a narrow channel."

Rob studied the bay meditatively. They steered along the course of the channel and were out on the

ocean. The sky was clearer now, though soft gray clouds went drifting about, and the sun shone with tempered brightness.

"Now the fishing ought to begin in good earnest."

It seemed as if it would. One after another hauled in a trophy. Rob dangled his line, let it float, pulled it in, and did everything tempting, but in vain. This was n't any fun at all.

"Uncle Robert, can't I come over on that side?" he said, presently.

"Certainly, if you wish."

"The luck appears to be there."

"Why, I am sure Bruce has caught several fine fellows."

"But I have n't."

"Come, then."

They stepped across. Rob dropped his squid in again and waited until he thought that even Job's patience would have been tried.

Suddenly his line slipped through his fingers. General Mackenzie saw it going and caught at it,

"Heavy enough for a shark," he said. "Pull in."

Something far away through the waters floundered and struggled, and seemed determined to resist their united efforts. Mr. Holland lent a hand.

There was a snap and Rob lost his balance, nearly standing on his head for a moment. The others gave a lurch, but recovered their position.

"That is gone!" said Mr. Holland. "Something with fins has a breakfast of lead and steel. I hope he will find it suited to his capacity. Never mind, Rob; try it again. Don't get discouraged."

"It is enough to discourage any one,— such luck!" declared Rob, brushing the hair out of his eyes. "I can't understand the reason —"

"His majesty was stronger than you," said Mr. Meredith.

"But you are all getting —" glancing at the fish in the bottom of the boat.

"Here is another line. There is always as good fish left in the sea."

Rob felt that his patience was being sorely tried. He had half a mind to go and take a lesson in managing the sail, and swinging the boom from side to side in that majestic fashion. If he did n't catch something in the next five minutes. Oh! —

There he was, a really magnificent fish! Rob unhooked him in triumph, — the largest one that had been caught.



"Bravo!" exclaimed the General.

There was no lack of excitement now. The fish came in fast and furious.

"But what will we do with them all?" asked Rob, by and by.

"We will try and not take in enough to swamp the boat. Meanwhile, I think I shall retire from active pursuits. I must confess to being hungry, as I breakfasted quite early this morning."

With that Mr. Holland brought out a pail carefully packed, with some lumps of ice in the bottom, which served to keep the provisions cool, — a bottle or two of home-made currant wine and some delicious-looking sandwiches, which he handed around.

"We all have a right to be hungry," said Mr. Meredith, looking at his watch. "It is high noon, and I do believe we have done our duty by the inhabitants of the briny deep."

Even Rob was tempted at length, and began to divide his attention between lunch and fishing. Such exciting sport was quite new to him. Beside the blue-fish there were Spanish mackerel and an occasional sea-bass. It really did seem as if he was intent upon filling the boat.

Mr. Meredith began to grow weary at length, and proposed that they should return to the bay and rest awhile at the hotel. Rob rather reluctantly acquiesced. General Mackenzie pointed out several spots of interest, and told how near a rebel cruiser had run up during the war.

So they tacked about again. The tide was not coming in yet, and the wind had died down somewhat, but they managed to escape the bar in their turnings and windings. The bay was fairly alive now, for though the sun was directly overhead the fresh, strong breeze tempered its vivid rays. Several row-boats were having a spirited race, and that attracted Rob at once.

They gave a rather sweeping tack and came into the dock at the front of the hotel. Children were running about the piazzas, groups of men were lounging and smoking with a lazy, listless air.

"Oh!" exclaimed Bruce, "could n't we visit the lighthouse? Or," — with an after-thought, — "had we better wait until —" "the ladies can come," he was going to add, but he checked himself with a little rising color.

"By all means," exclaimed Rob. "What is the use of waiting?"

That inducement was sufficiently strong to lead him to draw in his line. Captain King had covered the fish to protect them from the heat, and now settled himself in the shadow of the sail.

"Jim and I will stay," he said to Mr. Holland, "but you had better pilot the party."

It was quite a rest to step out of the boat. Rob felt cramped and stiff, but in a few moments he grew limber again.

"We will not stop at the hotel now," Uncle Robert said, "but take it on our way back, if we desire."

The boys glanced over the long stretch of sand with not a tree visible. How odd it looked! The beach was strewn with shells and fragments of seaweed, left there by the last out-going tide. Rob and Bruce began to fill their pockets with pink and pearly treasures, thinking how the girls would delight in them.

They trudged on to the lighthouse beyond, and sat down for several moments in the shade to rest themselves and enjoy the wandering breeze. Rob took a careful outside survey.

"What an odd place to live in!" he exclaimed;

"yet I do believe I should like it. Nothing to do but just keep the light in order."

"It seems a little thing," returned General Mackenzie, "and yet the gravest of consequences depend upon it, — the lives of many human beings, the safety of many a precious cargo."

Rob glanced idly over the ocean. There did n't seem much danger in those laughing, racing billows, with a white crest atop, reflecting the sun's rays like a prism.

"I wonder if there are many wrecks," he said, slowly.

"This is to warn. One would be foolish to rush into danger, yet sometimes there are fierce storms which no human power can rule or govern, no human skill avert."

"And if he should forget, or not put in sufficient oil to last?"

"This is his business, his duty. His position, you know, depends upon his fidelity. Like the watchman on the walls, he is to give no uncertain signal."

There was a graver side to it, as Rob was beginning to feel, with these serious but kindly eyes upon him.

"He might be an example to us," the General went

on. "If we always had the strength and courage to point out dangerous places to our fellow-men there might be fewer wrecks ; or even if we always heeded the beacon."

The boy glanced up as if the thought was quite new. Yet he did not need to ask what the dangerous places were, nor even the beacon.

"We all have a duty in this matter, — to let our light shine."

"But if we did n't have any, or only a very little ?"

"We all have some power of warning, some truth to glorify in our daily lives. For there is never a day but some eye has been directed towards us, and every time we do a wrong act we may lure a weak soul astray."

Mr. Holland was well acquainted with the keeper, who made his appearance at this juncture.

"Will you go up, gentlemen ?" he asked, after shaking hands cordially.

"I believe we are ready. Are you sufficiently rested, Meredith ?"

"Equal to the ascent of Mont Blanc," was the laughing reply.

They started up the stairway, the boys first and in high glee. Here and there a window gave light and allowed them a glimpse of sea and sky. Up and up, panting for breath, or sitting down on the steps to rest.

"Though it is n't to be compared to Bunker Hill Monument," said Bruce. "The first time I went up that, I felt as if my legs were broken just above the knee."

They reached the summit at last, and went out on the high balcony. On one side the ocean as far as they could see, dotted with ships that appeared to be sailing to ports in cloudland. Beyond the bay rose spires nestling among the towns, the great cities farther off, meadows and woodland, until it seemed as if all the world was before one.

Here was the huge lantern with its great cyclopean eye, that swung round in the darkest night to light the wayfarer tossed on the far billows. Miles and miles away they could see it with its fiery glow of warning. It came home to Rob's heart with a new and more comprehensive meaning. The words kept ringing through his brain,—to point out dangerous places.

Rob was much interested in the keeper's description of the glass. It was a very powerful one, known as the Fresnel light.

"You wish to go up, of course," said the keeper.

"Oh! can we?"

They all laughed at Rob's earnestness. To reach the lantern they climbed a ladder, and entered the cupola. There was the soul of the lighthouse, a not extremely large lamp. It contained four concentric burners, and the oil was pumped up from a small cistern below by means of a clockwork movement, by which the wicks were incessantly overflowed.

"But suppose it *should* go out?" said Rob.

"It is our business to see that it does not," the keeper answered, with a smile.

Rob and Bruce inspected the lens and the reflecting prisms, ranged with such nicety. The upper rays were refracted by inclined hanging lenses, ultimately reflected in the required direction by silvered mirrors. The great mass of prisms one above another increased the intensity of the light.

It was very interesting to Rob, who examined everything minutely, but he decided that living in a lighthouse might get to be quite monotonous, after all.

"O, there is always an assistant; but you know when one accepts a position he takes all its responsibilities."

He met Mr. Meredith's eye just then, which seemed to have a peculiar meaning in it.

"Well," said his uncle, at length, "it is time we thought of returning"; so they all expressed their obligation to the keeper for his kindness.

They found their boat and fish safe under the protection of Captain King. It lay rocking there in the slow tide that was too indolent just now to more than stir the water.

"Well, what news?" asked the Captain, jocularly.

"Did you have a glimpse of China, young men? and were the Celestials sipping tea?"

"Not quite that," returned Rob, with a smile. "But it was either pagoda-tops or tree-tops."

Jimmy Green laughed at the idea, taking it in its literal sense.

"When will the tide be in?" asked Mr. Holland.

"About an hour. They are having great fun opposite. Will you go over a little while?"

"I guess so. Beating about is rather tiresome."

Three or four boats were in the midst of a school



of fish. Rob caught the infection again and had his squid out in a trice. Suddenly there was a great shout in the boat nearest the bar, and two or three men began to draw in something.

"Is it a shark?" asked Rob, alive with interest.

"O no; only a blue-fish, I guess. Shall we go down?"

The sail swung round. Rob was watching the monster eagerly. If not a whale, a very king of blue-fish was he. The men had him hauled in by the time the boat reached the spot. There was great cheering over the exploit.

"I wonder how large mine would have been?" he said, regretfully, thinking of his lost squid.

"That is a good day's work," declared the man. "I think I shall retire upon the strength of that. Let us take him over to the dock before he upsets us."

Prince blue-fish was floundering about tremendously. He did not seem to relish this change to such proscribed quarters, and — perhaps being of a bashful turn — hardly enjoyed the constant attention, the poking and thumping and twisting, that he received on every side.

"He is a bouncer! Let us weigh him. Connelly, what will you take for half?"

"I will consider on that," returned the other.

They went up to the dock and landed, and were soon surrounded by an eager crowd. Guesses and bets were freely offered. They managed to get him weighed, after a deal of trouble.

"Fifteen pounds!"

"No, it ain't possible!" said a brawny fisherman. "That beats anything I have seen this long while. Fifteen pounds!"

Rob looked on in amazement. He had never seen anything like it before either, though he had heard some pretty large fish stories. But here was a large fact.

There was quite a discussion about cutting it up. One man was very anxious for half, and wished to return as soon as possible to the island with his trophy.

So presently they commenced. Rob and Bruce turned away, a trifle chicken-hearted at the sight.

"Hillo!" said some one; "what is this?"

"Why, the fellow has swallowed a squid, line and all. He has throat enough, I am sure."

That called Rob back. He elbowed his way through the crowd. "Did you say a squid, sir? Will you let me see it?"

The man dipped it in water to rinse it. "That is no uncommon thing. I have known it afore."

Rob looked at it, wiped the wet off with his coat-sleeve in true boy fashion. There were three initials, cut in with the point of his knife, "R. C. A." "It is mine," he announced, triumphantly. "I lost it this morning. It was the first bite I had, and the fellow ran off with it."

"Well, that is queer enough. Your line, you see, was n't heavy. Connolly, you have played second' fiddle to this young gent. The squid is his."

"He ought to have part of the fish to make up for the bad luck," said some one.

"O, never mind. I have had a good deal of fun to-day, and I am rather glad that I had such a large bite."

With that both boys turned and walked down to the dock again, where Rob displayed his squid in triumph.

The wind began to freshen, though Mr. Holland declared it was in the wrong corner. The tide was

on the change, but would soon be in their favor, so they ran up the jib and started. Rob took a seat by Captain King, and was soon deep in the mysteries of managing the sail.

It was about dusk when they reached home. The spoils were divided, though Mr. Meredith declared that he did not know what they would do with them all. A bright idea struck Jimmy Green, however. "I can sell some to the neighbors," he said. "I often do."

"I think we will have to contribute to such a laudable enterprise," said Mr. Conover. "You must have a double portion, Jimmy."

Emma and Kathie sat on the piazza a long while that evening, listening to the boys' adventures, described in most glowing colors.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## DANGEROUS PLACES.

A VISTA of amusement opened rapidly before the young people. Early in the ensuing week Mrs. Thorpe's beach party took place. They went out in a nice roomy yacht, taking provisions, fresh water, and ice. The sail about the bay was exceedingly pleasant, though the beach, it must be confessed, looked rather hot and dreary to the Cedarwood portion.

"But where are we to have our dinner?" asked Kathie. "There is n't a bit of shade anywhere."

"We are going to rig up a little shanty. You see we islanders are used to the sun, and there is always a good stiff breeze down here. But we made some calculations for to-day."

So saying, Mr. Holland began to unpack a huge parcel. Several of the gentlemen hammered down stakes until they stood quite firmly. Over these there was to be tied an awning of sailcloth, which would protect them while at dinner.

"We can do that when the time comes," said some one. "Suppose we take a ramble around first. Our bathing we can save until towards night."

The ramble was delightful to Kathie and Emma. They soon made friends with the younger portion of the party, and set off in search of curiosities. The shells were not remarkable for their beauty, but once in a while they found a real gem. Then there were curious seaweeds and grasses, and fish coming up to the very shore-edge, as if to inquire what business these strangers had here.

The boys, in the mean while, went hunting after clams, and then built a fire to roast them, — a circle of stones, heated by the blaze of dry pine branches, over which the ladies boiled their kettle; then they made a kind of oven and laid the clams upon the coals. There was a great crackling and sputtering, but they roasted in a delightful fashion. Mr. Holland had fastened up the awning, the table-cloth was spread on the smooth sand, and the dishes arranged.

Quite a feast indeed. Cold chicken in all styles, delicious tongue, biscuits, snowy bread, canned fruits, spiced fish, tea, coffee, and lemonade, to say nothing of the boys' roast clams,

"This makes me think of last summer," remarked Kathie; "only there were not so many of us."

"But it was quite a success," said Mr. Meredith.

"Even Rob's night in the woods was rather thrilling," remarked Jessie.

Bruce wanted to know about it. Mr. Holland drew near as well, and Rob recounted the adventures, quite harrowing up the feelings of his audience when he came to the mysterious noises that they fancied must be the groans of a murdered man, and which turned out to be only the grunt of a pig. They all laughed heartily over it.

It was after three when they finished their dinner. The ladies washed and packed dishes, and part of them were taken to the boat. Then the sun began to slip under the fleecy clouds that scudded here and there across the sky.

"It will be pleasant to have a little taste of the surf by and by," said Mr. Holland. "By the time we get over and are ready it will be safe to go in."

So they walked over to the ocean, rigged up two little tents for dressing-rooms, and proceeded to attire themselves in bathing costume. Mr. Holland knew every inch of the beach, and just where to avoid holes

in the sand. A few ladies in the party could swim, but the rest meant to keep near the shore.

It was great fun running out and in with a long white-crested wave chasing up behind one. Now and then it overtook you, and seemed as if it meant to carry you out to sea. There were plenty of strong arms to rescue the venturesome in an emergency.

The boys swam like ducks. Jessie and Emma gained courage at length to take one little lesson, and General Mackenzie carried Kathie so far out that she was almost afraid of being drowned.

They laughed, shouted, called to one another, ran about with now and then a fall on the soft, wet sand, and frolicked to their hearts' content. Presently a voice rang out clear: "Run in to the shore, quick! Boys!"

"A shark! a shark!"

All eyes turned when they had reached a place of safety. Out beyond there was a white line, quite different from the dancing foam. This came along in a majestic fashion, and with a mysterious stir in the water that showed it was endowed with life.

"O, look how far away Rob is!" exclaimed Kathie.



"Boys, swim for your lives," said Mr. Holland, making a speaking trumpet of his hands. "Though there is n't any real danger," he added, when he saw how pale and frightened Kathie looked.

His highness evidently scented the boys, for he turned in their direction, but they were in like a flock of birds.

"Is n't it odd?" exclaimed Rob, all excitement. "We never saw one the other day. I wish he would come farther in, I would like to have a nearer view."

"So that he did not come near enough to taste of you," said his uncle. "A pretty good sized fellow, I should judge."

"Yes," returned Mr. Holland. "It is safer to be at a respectable distance."

They watched him for several moments. Now nearer, now farther off, the suspicious white line visible, then hidden by the billows.

"Are there many here?" asked Mr. Meredith.

"Not a great many. For ordinary swimming and bathing, I suppose the bay is safer, though they occasionally find their way there. The smaller ones are often captured."

"I only wish we could catch that fellow!" said Rob.

But the "fellow" made his last bow and disappeared. They did not care to bathe any more, and began to change their wet clothing. By the time they had walked back, gathered up the last of their traps, and gone to the boat, it was sundown. The moon, however, was rising on the other side, and looked lovely as it came up out of the water attended by one star.

The sail home was delightful, and just before they dispersed they had another round of cake and lemonade. Kathie and Emma were glad to tumble into bed without a mouthful of supper, though Mrs. Bennet brought them up some cream to bathe their faces.

"I have some rose-glycerine," said Emma.

"I don't believe any of the new-fangled things are as good as cream. You will find the burn pretty well out by morning."

So, to please her, they used it and were soon asleep, but the next morning they discerned the benefit.

Bruce and Rob were out every day. The former could manage a sail very nicely, but Rob was forbidden to try it alone. However, he took every opportunity of learning, and was indulged in a trip to Sag Harbor in one of the sloops, which he thought a

great event, though Bruce preferred to stay at home with the girls.

It seemed to Kathie that she never had time for anything. Her books and sewing lay unheeded. It was dinner and tea and croquet and little musical parties, to say nothing of the drives everywhere.

They found some beautiful places. It was not all white sand nor scrub oaks. Some very delightful summer residences, with tasteful grounds, quaint little villages, and two or three lakes that were quite marvels in their way. One of these, Lake Ronkonkama, of which a peculiar story was told, — that it took seven years to rise to its highest altitude, and was seven years in falling again. It was very clear and tranquil. They could see the pebbly bottom a great way out, as they drove round the shore-edge, oftentimes in the shade of luxuriant trees. It had no visible outlet, and was a lovely little wonder there, hidden away from the outside world.

Mr. Meredith was gaining strength every day. He bathed and rowed with nearly all his olden agility, and entered with great zest into the boys' amusements. But there was a gentle gravity that sometimes arrested Rob's attention. He was no less

charming or fascinating; indeed, he attracted Bruce wonderfully, but the careless jest and daring had given way to quieter graces. Was it all due to his having been so ill?

Emma managed, between the eating and drinking and dissipation, — for it always seemed as if meals were jumbled together, and that night came a great deal sooner here than elsewhere, — to make some very pretty sketches. One she gave to Mrs. Bennet, who had it framed immediately, and hung it over the mantel. Miss Wealthy descanted on her genius in the usual high-flown tones.

“I can’t help laughing when I think of Rob’s tirades,” Emma said. “He makes them sound so exactly like hers, and yet they have n’t a bit of sense in them.”

“I am sure I don’t understand half of hers,” returned Kathie. “And she showed me some poetry she wrote when she was a little girl, which she thought gave evidence of a high order of genius.”

“Yes, she read it to me. I really did n’t know what to say. And yet she is so good-hearted and sensible in some things. I wonder if it is being —”

“Being what?” asked Kathie, after a moment of silence.

"Being an old maid. I believe they are always queer."

Kathie looked thoughtful. Aunt Ruth was n't a bit queer, but, of course, she was a good deal younger than Miss Wealthy.

"I don't believe it is that," she said, slowly.

"Well, I hope I shall never be queer or foolish."

So they came to the third week. Everybody was getting along beautifully at Cedarwood, and Freddy was the best of boys, though Hannah would be very glad to see them back again. General Mackenzie lingered because Bruce was having such a good time, and thought he might as well finish his vacation here.

Mr. and Mrs. Adams and Mr. Langdon were coming down to the Surf Hotel. This would be quite an addition to their party, though Kathie declared it took in the whole neighborhood now.

One morning Emma had a letter from Lou Rossiter. She was having a very gay time at Saratoga. Hops, dinners, moonlight drives, and elegant dresses were largely descanted upon.

"And who do you think is here?" she wrote. "Miss Belle Hadden in all her glory. She and the Miss Meredith we met at Cedarwood are fast friends,

and have hosts of admirers. Belle snubbed me beautifully at first, but on second thoughts was more cordial, though I did n't care a bit. The ladies declare that she dresses and dances outrageously, but the gentlemen do admire her very much. She has been carrying on a desperate flirtation with a man old enough to be her father, but very rich ; and it is said that she would marry him in a moment. Only yesterday we were all school-girls together."

She read it aloud to Kathie, as there were no confidences in it.

"How strange that Mrs. Meredith allows Ada in such companionship!" Kathie said. "It always seemed as if she was very particular. I wonder if she knew —"

"I guess everybody heard of it at the time. And yet it was n't her fault, as you once said."

"No ; and I suppose she ought not to be punished for her father's sins. But —"

Kathie paused there. She did not wish to say anything uncharitable, but how could Ada and her mother refuse to see any grace in dear Jessie, who was sweet and noble, and whose family were above any suspicion or scandal, and then receive Belle

Hadden to an intimacy? She was not able to understand it at all.

"We don't envy them, anyway," Emma returned, gayly. "I am sure we have our hands and hearts full of pleasure, and plenty of dancing, too, when we feel like it. I had to laugh the other night when every one was up in that old Virginia reel at Mrs. Gray's. How they did all enjoy it!"

The girls had been through the lighthouse, down to the Surf Hotel, out to sea in a regular sailing vessel, had bathed and fished and gathered nearly a cargo of shells, Mr. Meredith said. They had made several very pretty shell frames as gifts to some of their kind friends. It appeared to Kathie that there could be nothing more to do, but every day brought a fresh enjoyment.

"This week will have to be our very last," declared General Mackenzie. "I have some business that must be attended to, and shall go to West Point with Bruce. I can never begin to thank you for all the kindness and pleasure."

Aunt Ruth and the General sat a long while on the piazza that night. Somehow, of late, they had fallen into a quiet companionship. He was so grave.

and courteous and tender, and she, with a peculiar winsomeness, appeared neither old nor young. Indeed, she would never be old with her sweet face and pure, loving heart.

Bruce had said good night to Kathie long before.

"It is a little too bad that you have everything and everybody," he said, in a tone of pleasant jest. "Such a lovely home, and a mother, and hosts of relations and friends. And then, think how it will be with me after all these delightful weeks. I have half a mind to let Rob go in my place."

Kathie felt like opening her generous heart and taking in nearly everybody. Only you could n't make them your very own, after all.

The next day they found Mr. and Mrs. Adams and Mr. Langdon. Emma declared that they began their course of gayety over again with as great a zest as ever.

Rob prided himself greatly upon his nautical knowledge. A sail-boat was really nothing in his estimation when he learned how to manage a yacht, and all about sloops and schooners. But Uncle Robert would not remove his restrictions, though it was more for his mother's comfort than from any real fear of the boy.



He and Bruce were allowed to go out together. Being at the hotel so much they had made several acquaintances. One girl in particular attracted Rob very strongly, — Laura Seldon. She was one of those bright, ready, daring girls who could see fun in everything, — rather hoydenish and quite lawless. She was staying with an invalid aunt, who had really no control over her.

She came up to spend one night with Kathie, more on Rob's invitation, though, and kept them laughing nearly every moment of the time. She did mimic Miss Wealthy to the life, though it rather smote Kathie's conscientious heart.

"Nonsense; what harm does it do?" exclaimed Rob. "She may laugh at us as much as she pleases."

Then they went down to the hotel, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Meredith. It was a hot, sultry day, and after tiring themselves with all kinds of in-door games, Laura proposed they should take a walk on the beach.

"I certainly shall swelter in here," she said. "There won't be enough left of me to make a tallow dip."

So out they went. There were quite a number promenading under the shade of umbrellas and im-

mense sun-hats. Now and then a boating-party went out or another came in.

"Could n't we take a sail?" asked Laura. "See, Mr. Thomas is coming in with that lovely little Swallow. I was out in her one day myself, and she goes like a bird. Such a dainty, pretty thing!"

"We might find out, like the fishes, whether there is any coolness on the bay."

"O do!" Laura ran forward, and watched Mr. Thomas hand out a lady. "Is the boat engaged afterward?" was her eager question.

"No. Would you young people like to have it? I engaged it until six o'clock, and it is only five now. You may use it an hour."

Laura glanced at Rob. A pretty, arch face it was, with a very beseeching expression. And somehow there was a peculiar affinity between Rob and Laura. Both were spirited, careless, ready for fun at a moment's notice. Then she could row, manage a sail, and, as Rob said, "was n't foolish and fussy like most girls."

"We will take it," Rob returned, with his manliest air, for it really appeared derogatory in him to refuse.

"Well. Six o'clock, remember."

Rob sprang in, settled the cushions to his liking, and took a survey of the "little beauty."

"That is all right," he said. "Now, girls."

"Oh!" said Kathie, "are you quite sure that we ought?"

"Ought? Why, you foolish little thing, what is the matter now?"

"Did Uncle Robert say you might go out alone?"

The permission never had been given in so many words. He and Bruce had managed a sail several times together, and then he had been out in nearly everything on the bay.

"Why, of course he would let me now! That was when I did n't know anything scarcely about a sail."

"Why, I have been out by myself," said Laura. "Are you really afraid, Rob?"

That look and tone would have urged Rob into any step. Laura queened it over her small subjects now, just as in years to come she would govern those of a larger growth. Imperious, wilful, yet with a certain dash of sweetness that she could render a very dangerous weapon. But now there was a lurking suggestion in her tone that Rob could endure least of all. He was not afraid himself, neither would he be ruled by a little girl like Kathie.

"Afraid? No!" he exclaimed, with an indignant flush. "Don't be such a silly little goose, Kathie! There is not the slightest danger. Come."

Laura caught her hand. "Don't spoil all Rob's pleasure," she said, entreatingly.

"Won't you go and ask Mr. Meredith first? or let me."

"What nonsense, Kathie! As if I could n't manage a boat! Why, I have done it when Uncle Robert and Mr. Meredith were both on board. Come, don't be mean and ungracious."

"I want you to go so much," said Laura, who had an idea that her aunt would not altogether approve of her going out alone with so young a cavalier. "Dear Kathie, I think you might."

It was hard for Kathie to refuse. Laura was very generous in sharing her pleasures with any one else, and had entertained them very delightfully all day.

"Could n't you go without me?" she asked, slowly.

"I would n't, though. And when you come to spend the day with me —"

"You *might* be obliging, Kathie. See how our time is going!" and Rob's glance said that a refusal would be sheer contrariness.

Kathie stepped on board. She was n't sure there was any actual wrong in it, and it did seem very dis-obliging not to go.

"Beside, we have a pair of oars," said Rob. "If Kathie likes best, we can row."

He did n't think there was much fun in rowing when one could sail. Just now it was his passion. Every other pleasure was as nothing compared to it.

The girls were seated, and just as Rob pushed off a breeze of wind caught the sail and sent them skimming along.

"Was n't that lovely!" exclaimed Laura. "We will have a little breeze anyhow, and just think how delightfully cool it is,—a good deal better than marching up and down the hot sand."

It was very delightful. Kathie looked over the dim stretches of the sea, duskily green and crested with the spray-edge of the billows. What great, suggestive world lay outside? There were ships with their sails furled that seemed going down in mid-ocean, so distinct was the rounded sea line.

Rob and Laura were very gay, laughing and jesting; and, as Kathie listened, she was compelled now and then to join the merriment. Rob told of some

school-boy larks that seemed to amuse her very much, and she, in return, related a very funny escapade at boarding-school, so skilfully managed by two or three disguises that no one could ever find out the ring-leaders. She told a story with so much dash and sparkle that the mere watching her face was enough to interest one.

"O Rob," exclaimed Kathie, suddenly, "see where you are! Don't go out to sea."

"I am not going," returned Rob. "We will turn at the point here, and then go back."

But a sudden flaw of wind took them straight on. And then a low, distant rumbling made them look at one another with startled eyes.

"Was it thunder?" Kathie asked.

A huddled mass of indigo cloud, with an ominously yellow edge, was scudding up from the southeast, while one from the north was coming down to meet it. Yet in the west there were blue sky and sunshine.

"Don't get frightened," said Rob. "It will not rain; at least, not right away."

The sail flapped around with a loud bang. Laura sprang to the tiller, meaning to keep the boat up to the wind, but that veered round and came strong from

the east ; so fierce that, for a moment, it seemed as if their little bark would be plunged beneath the next billow. They all held their breath an instant.

And now the scurrying clouds covered the sun, and a long, sharp, jagged streak of light shot across the sky. •

“Head her in to shore,” exclaimed Rob. “It is going to rain, and if we can only get there —”

But the whole sea was in a commotion. The waves began chasing one another far up the beach, throwing clouds of spray even into the boat. The sail, Rob’s pride, was worse than useless. In the lull he unshipped the mast and pulled out the oars.

“We will get in to the beach,” said Laura, cheerily. “Don’t look so ghostly white, Kathie; you frighten me.”

Kathie tried to bite the color back to her lips. She *was* frightened, and she could not help it, for with it all came a consciousness that they should not have been here.

A few large drops of water plashed down, and another fearful clap of thunder. Even Laura turned pale this time.

“I am a goose,” she said, “all but the feathers. I



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know the thunder can't hurt any one, but the noise startles me. We will soon run ashore, though."

Rob pulled away with his strongest strokes. What a mercy the oars had been left in! His eyes were strained upon that ridge of gray sand over which the billows were tumbling and dashing. If he *could* make it, run the boat aground, — they could wade through the rest.

Kathie looked, too, hardly breathing. There was safety so near that she could not feel much afraid. Nearer, nearer —

A blinding dash of spray and rain, a vivid flash and startling peal, and they seemed to be engulfed in darkness. Kathie felt the briny waves in her very face, wetting her lips with the spray. Were they drowning? but no, they rose on the top of the next seething billow, and saw the world again; but the long strip of sand, grown white in the surrounding darkness, was farther off, and making headway against this gale appeared almost impossible. Still Rob tried with all his strength and might.

"Girls," he exclaimed, suddenly, "I am going to call for help. Maybe some one will hear us. There are lots of boats about."

Three long, eager cries. Did any one hear them amid the rush and roar of the waves and the shrieking of the winds? Would it be anything more than the sound of the sea-gull?

He tried again, manfully beating back the waves. They came nearer once more, nearer still, and all held their breath. Down below the great brazen throat of the gale was shrieking again, and the mad billows would soon give another tiger's leap. So near to safety that their hearts beat with hope.

Alas! Rob's tired arms were no match for that fierce blast. Before he could tighten his grasp, one oar was swept away, and all his labor undone.

Kathie crouched in the bottom of the boat. Rob had bidden her do it for safety. Laura's eyes were blazing with a brave, steady light, as if she meant to endure the worst proudly, having thus risked her fate.

An exceeding bitter cry passed Rob's lips. It would be so hard to go down to the depths of these billows when a long, bright life stretched out beyond them. And his mother, Aunt Ruth, Uncle Robert, — perhaps they might not care so much for him, but to be deprived of Kathie —

"O Kathie!" and he kissed the cold, wet forehead, clustered about by damp curls, "God knows how sorry I am that I asked you to come. If he would take my life and let you live to be a comfort to them all, I would n't mind then."

The old verse came back to her, and it touched her to have Rob so ready to lay down his life for her. Amid all the roaring and ringing, the blinding flashes and darkness, she seemed to see pictures all the way back,—the soldiers who had gone and come again, saved in the hollow of God's hand; the old, happy summer; the days with Aunt Ruth, when she had been searching for God in her simple child's fashion; and, farther still, the little cottage with mamma and Aunt Ruth sewing, and Rob sick in bed.

"You *will* forgive me, Kathie? To think that I should have led you into this horrible danger. I might have been more careful. I might—"

Kathie gave him one convulsive kiss. And as she felt the rush and roll of the waves she said a little prayer for him, for Laura, for herself, and that God would help mamma and the rest to bear it. Then it seemed as if she was floating off to heaven.

Rob saw something dark and terrible looming near,

and a strong arm seemed to clutch at him with a giant's grasp.

"Save her!" he cried. "Save her! Never mind me; let me go!" and it seemed to him, in that moment of overwhelming agony, as if his soul went out of his body. And this was all the reward for his mother's love, for Uncle Robert's care and kindness! Could they even forgive him when he was dead?

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE TRUE LIGHT AND SURE HAVEN.

"THE pluckiest gal that ever I see! She can swim like a fish. But I thought the youngster would drag me down to Davy Jones. Have we found 'em all? Were there more than three, I wonder?"

Laura raised her head. Her eyes were blinded and her throat full of salt water, that seemed to strangle every breath.

"There were only three," she gasped.

"Thank the Lord!"

Then the rough sailor began to wipe her face and wring out her hair.

"Never you mind, darter," he said. "This blow will soon be over; it is slackin' up now. You kin swim ekal to the best of 'em"; and he stroked the wet cheek in his admiration.

"You are sure they are safe, — three, — Robert and Kathie?"

"The little gal was a'most drowned. The young

fellow held on to her, you see, and made it kinder bad for both. Funny, too, the boat is safe, so you hain't lost nothing. But who ever taught you to swim?"

Rob roused himself from the wet deck and espied Kathie.

"O, she is n't dead," he cried; "tell me that."

"No, she is n't dead. Jack, help these youngsters down in the cabin. We will try some brandy for the girl. She will be as chipper as you please in a few minutes."

One of the sailors carried Laura down in his arms. Rob helped himself, and as he followed Kathie's apparently lifeless body, he kissed the wet, tangled hair, that looked as limp as she. The noise of the waves and the storm was still ringing in his ears, and he could hardly think connectedly, but his heart was full of the deepest thankfulness.

It took some time to restore Kathie. The rain ceased and the wind fell a little, though it still lashed the billows into fury; but the clouds rolled off to the north, and the thunder kept up a distant muttering, as if dissatisfied with its brief reign.

"Belong to the hotel, I s'pose?" asked the captain of Rob.

"Yes, sir."

"You were n't over bright to get out beyond the p'int in that little clam-shell," he returned.

"We had a sail and the wind took us out."

"Come up awful sudden," said one of the sailors.

"It is rather dangerous for small craft out here. You just got off with your life, and that is about all. Let it be a lesson to you next time, young sir. Both gals your sisters?"

"No, only this one."

Rob was trying very hard to wink the tears out of his eyes. It seemed as if God had interposed and worked a special miracle to save them.

"How did you come to see us?" he asked.

"In a flash of lightning. Gil was putting the hatches down and just caught sight, so we watched for the next one. Narrer escape, though."

Rob felt that it was.

"I don't know how to thank you," he said, brokenly. "Not so much for my own life as—the others"; "Kathie's," he was going to say first, but that seemed discourteous.

"Better run up now, Gil," said the captain, "to the hotel."



Rob went over and sat by Kathie. Laura was there, chafing the cold hands and kissing them. You would hardly have thought that half an hour ago she had been swimming for her life, for the roses were out upon her cheeks, and her eyes bright, though with a little frightened look in them. A plucky girl, sure enough.

Rob gave Kathie's hand a tender squeeze, and the look said so much. She answered it with a faint smile, and closed her eyes again, for she could hardly follow a connected thought. A sense of great danger and as great deliverance brooded over her to the exclusion of all things else.

As they touched the wharf Rob ran out on deck. There were Mr. Thomas and Mr. Meredith foremost in the group. Rob never forgot the expression that passed over Mr. Meredith's face, as with a bound he was at the sloop's side.

Part of the story was soon told. The children and the boat had been picked up. Nothing worse than a pretty severe ducking had happened.

"Why did n't you come back as soon as you saw the cloud?" asked Mr. Thomas.

They had been laughing and singing, and mistrusted no danger until it was full upon them.

"No scolding at the youngsters," exclaimed the captain, good-naturedly. "If they had n't been brave and kept their senses about them they would all have gone to Davy Jones. This one," putting his hand on Laura's shoulder, "deserves a prize medal. She swam like a fish over the breakers."

Laura turned scarlet, conscious that she looked a good deal like a fish, with her wet garments clinging to her figure.

Mr. Meredith took Kathie in his arms and kissed the pale lips. While the rest were talking he bore her to the hotel, and sent Jessie to hunt up some dry clothes.

"My dear child," he said. "I should never have forgiven myself if any accident had happened. I have been wild with fear for the last hour."

"It came very near," she replied, tremulously; "but God stretched out his strong arm and saved me."

And then they glanced at each other with a sweet, peculiar confidence, a trust born of God's love alone, the self-same joy he had experienced on his hospital pallet, that, living or dying, it was well with him.

"I should have been very sorry, for there are so many bright, pleasant things to life, but God made

me strong to bear the pain. And so I just trusted him."

"My darling, that is our highest duty, our most precious blessing. Thank him for the faith."

Then Jessie came and sent him out, and cried over Kathie as she put on the dry garments. There could be no going home that night, so she took the child under her wing in true motherly fashion.

Rob, in the mean while, had borrowed some clothes, and was walking up and down the hall with Bruce, who was detailing the anxiety they had all undergone when the shower came up, as they had not heard until then that they were out sailing. And Rob, on his side, described the peril and his fruitless efforts.

"No one could have done any more," rejoined Bruce.

"Except the one thing," said Mr. Meredith, with his arm over Rob's shoulder.

Rob's face was scarlet. "I know," he replied, with a humility in his voice quite new, "I should have asked. But you might have given me permission."

"No, I do not believe I should," was the grave rejoinder. "You were in my charge, and I was in

some degree answerable for you. . O Rob, if I had been compelled to go back without you !”

He saw the error then. His heedlessness might have plunged them all into the deepest grief, and added a life-long reproach to this dear friend. Reaching out, he clasped the hand with an earnest, passionate warmth, but for the moment he could not speak.

“How is Kathie?” asked Bruce, filling up the pause.

“Rather languid and nervous, but I think a night’s rest will restore her.”

Just then the summons for supper sounded through the hall.

Rob and Laura were quite the lions of the entertainment. Every one was asking questions and expressing wonder that the first squall had not capsized them. Laura was bright and rosy, none the worse for her danger and the cold bath, and behaving quite beautifully for such a heroine. Indeed, her aunt’s anger and anxiety was quite mollified by this salve to her vanity.

Rob felt as if every mouthful would choke him. When he was asked a question, he had to steady his voice by a great effort before he dared to trust it to

reply. Every moment the awful consciousness went deeper and deeper into his soul. He *had* disobeyed. He knew now that Uncle Robert would not have trusted him to manage a sail-boat alone, and he ought not to have badgered Kathie into accompanying them. Would Uncle Robert ever trust him again? He began to understand how pure and fine a thing honor really is, — to be sure of any one through any temptation, alike when the restraining influence is far away or near at hand.

“Do you think I might see Kathie?” he asked of Mr. Meredith, quietly slipping away from the group who were ready to honor him.

“O yes. She must be quite rested by this time.”

They went slowly upstairs. Mrs. Meredith had a dim light burning in the farthest corner of the room, as she had needed it but a few moments ago. It gave the place a strange, awesome look, almost as if some one was dead, and Rob shivered. For it might have been death.

But Kathie held out her hand. Her face was very wan and pale seen thus in the mingling of lights, but she smiled sweetly enough to dissipate any anxiety about her.

Rob knelt beside the sofa and buried his face in her soft hair, just touching the cool cheek with his flushed brow. And then he could n't say a word, but Kathie heard the soft, half-strangled sob.

"O Rob!" in a faltering tone. "Dear Rob!"

"I can't help it, Kathie. The fault was all mine. I should n't have gone myself, or coaxed you. And if —"

"No, don't think of it"; and he felt her shudder. "God saved me at the right moment."

"I think He saved *me*, too. For, Kathie, I was nearly crazy at that instant. And though I have resolved and forgotten many a time, I do not believe that I ever shall forget again. I cried to him at that awful moment, and he did hear, did answer. I don't know how to be thankful enough. I could never have gone home without you."

"How terrible it would have been!"

They drew nearer together and clasped their arms around each other. Rob remembered the night when Freddy had been nearly drowned through his carelessness. But this would have caused so much more pain and anguish.

"Don't agitate her too much," Jessie said, presently.

Rob kissed the wet face over and over again. How many times he had been rude and rough, envious of her pleasures, impatient and cross with her, and when it came to that feeling, immensely superior to her because he was a boy! But it seemed just now as if there was no one in the whole world that he loved as well.

By and by he rose with a great effort, said a tender good-night, and went over to the window by Mr. Meredith.

"Shall we go out and take a little walk?" the gentleman asked.

"If you will, please," Rob returned, gratefully.

The stars were out in myriads, but the moon was a late visitant and would not be up yet for some time. The air was crisp and fresh, the shower having carried off the sultriness, and the waves were beating up the sandy floor with their monotonous music. The lighthouse lantern swung round and round with its voice of silent warning.

Rob's heart was very full and very tender. Mr. Meredith felt it, and he also understood that this would be a precious moment to bear testimony for the truth's sake. Kathie had not shrunk from any

such ordeal. The good seed was to be sown in this young heart, and God's grace was to bring forth the fruit.

A long, sweet talk it was. Perhaps no one else in the world could have had quite the same power and influence over Rob as this hero of his whom he had admired so enthusiastically in other matters. Well, indeed, that the more mature soul could direct in the right way.

"I wish I *could* think in time," Rob said, slowly. "It is the misfortune of my very life."

"There is something back of all this, Rob," the grave, comforting voice replied. "First of all, the desire to do right, not merely what will answer, or what is expedient, but, the best of all, the only true corner-stone in a man's character, the simple right."

"But if you could always tell —"

"I think you can. If no accident had happened to you this afternoon, would that have made the matter loyal and honorable?"

"No, it would n't," was the frank reply. "But I am afraid I should not have seen it so plainly."

"So it is sometimes well to learn our lessons through suffering. But, dear Rob, I want you to



see for yourself, and to believe fully with your own soul, that perfect truth and perfect honor are the chief essentials to any noble character, that, failing in these two, one comes short of the great standard. To be trusted out of sight, out of reach, anywhere. And God's grace gives the needed help. It was a late lesson for me, but I have learned it, I trust."

"Pray for me, that I may learn it now," Rob said, tremulously.

"Dear boy, I hope you may be found in the ranks when the great Captain summons his soldiers to all the small, needful duties of daily life, as well as the greater battles. And may he say 'well done' to both of us at the last."

It seemed to Rob as if a new life had already begun in his soul. The experience of this afternoon could never be forgotten,—the nearness of death and the overwhelming sense of responsibility. All for a freak of foolish boy independence,—the idea of being able to do about as he liked. But it seemed as if he should never so dare or so desire again. There were some braver and better qualities than disobedience.

Kathie was quite her olden self the next morning, although still rather pale, and with a disposition to

start at every sound. Laura embraced her rapturously, kissed and cried over her, and told her twenty times that she was *so* sorry that she had over-persuaded her to go with them, and ended her love and repentance with, "But you *ought* to learn to swim, Kathie. I was n't a bit frightened, for I knew, when I heard the voices, that I could swim until some one rescued me."

One of the numerous captains was going up the bay, and Mr. Meredith decided that they had better return, as Kathie really needed quiet and her mother's tranquillizing influence to restore her perfectly. So they said good by, and started on their short journey.

Rob was quite grave and thoughtful, and evinced a tender consideration for Kathie's comfort. How glad he was to have her no one knew. Now and then the terrible thought *would* enter his mind,—what if they were going home without her! Ah, how could he ever have met his mother and the rest?

It was a soft, gray, half-cloudy day, and they enjoyed the quiet of sea and sky wonderfully. It was just dinner-time when they entered Mrs. Bennet's

roomy hall, and heard the sound of Miss Wealthy's rather shrill voice discoursing on the attraction that certain natures held for other certain natures.

"Well, well, runaways!" she exclaimed, "we did not know but you were caught in a storm and wrecked. We had a terrific shower last evening, a perfect West Indies tornado, accompanied by fearful flashes of lightning. I suppose the bay was too rough for you to venture. Come, you must sit down and have some dinner. Just lay your hats anywhere, and don't mind about going upstairs. We will excuse all imperfections."

Kathie went quietly around to her mother and kissed her. It seemed so good and sweet that her eyes involuntarily filled with tears. But all the rest were talking and laughing, and her agitation passed unremarked, save by the keen, intuitive perception of love.

Mrs. Bennet declared that they would have to take up with what was left, unless they had been spoiled upon hotel fare.

"Are you tired?" Emma asked, in a low tone, making room for Kathie beside her. "You look pale. Did you have a very nice time? and how is Laura?"

"We had better inquire of Rob," declared the General.

"Miss Laura came down to the wharf to see us off," Mr. Meredith answered for him. "She was looking very bright and rosy."

Rob colored furiously at first, and then turned pale, whereupon Miss Wealthy had to rush in the field, which rather disconcerted him. However, no one was very hungry and the meal soon came to an end.

The General had received a business letter calling him to New York by the middle of the following week. Bruce had a number of calls to make in the city, so it had been decided that they would not return to Cedarwood with the others. Mr. Conover felt quite desirous to learn how matters were going on at home, and Mrs. Alston was sure that Freddy must require a little supervision by this time.

These arrangements were discussed immediately.

"But I am afraid that Jessie will not want to stay after the rest are gone," said Mr. Meredith. "It seems to me that you have taken advantage of our absence to plan a conspiracy."

Uncle Robert came round to Kathie's side. "My little girl," he asked, "was n't it a happy visit?"

Suppose she had never come back to them! No wonder she shivered a little.

"Sometime I will tell you all about it," she replied.

They went on planning. Rob heard that the General had obtained permission to take him to New York for a week with Bruce, but he made a quiet resolve in his heart.

It seemed to him that there never would be a chance to get Uncle Robert alone. One and another kept him engaged, then the carriage came and he went out to ride.

"I am glad you are going to the city with me," said Bruce. "Father always has so many friends that I am left to hunt up my own amusements, for gentlemen's dinner-parties are not very entertaining. We will have a grand good time. Are n't you delighted?"

"I don't believe I shall go," Rob made answer, soberly.

"Not go!" was the amazed exclamation.

"I have not deserved it," said Rob, with a rising flush. "And though I know my uncle will not take back his permission, I shall accept the disappointment as a punishment. I am in earnest about trying

to do what is just right hereafter, and I will keep this to help me remember."

Bruce urged no further, but he told his father that night that Rob looked like a hero when he said it. So Rob carried about his weight until evening, and by that time it was pretty heavy. But then he managed to get Uncle Robert to walk down the path unobserved.

That there had been a change going on in Rob's character was shown in the straightforward manner in which he went about his story. Two years ago the confession of a wrong would have been a greater bugbear to him than the wrong itself. He was too humble now, too sincerely repentant, to shelter himself behind any false pride. Uncle Robert guessed by the pauses and the occasional breaks in his voice how deep and sincere his pain really was.

"If I had been there, Rob, do you think I would have consented?" his uncle asked, quietly.

"I do not believe you would. I persuaded myself then that, as you had allowed me to go out with Bruce, and seen me manage a sail-boat, you would have no objection. It was because I wanted to go so much."

"I wonder, Rob, if I shall ever be able to trust you out of my sight, ever have entire and perfect confidence in you!"

The tone was low and sad, but it went to the boy's heart with a keener pang than the severest reproach could have done.

"O Uncle Robert," he said, chokingly, "if you *could* know how truly sorry I am, and how firmly I have resolved to keep to the very spirit of obedience hereafter, and if you could have had that awful sense of despair and wrong-doing when it seemed as if Kathie would be lost through my self-will —" There Rob broke down. The unfinished sentence ended with a sob.

His uncle's arm was around him and drew him nearer. "Rob," he said, with tender gravity, "I never can be thankful enough that God saved you all. To have had Kathie's death on your hands would have been the most terrible thing you can imagine, though we should all have felt too profoundly sorry for you ever to have added a feather's weight to the burden. We have you both, and we can still rejoice. But, Rob, there is something still more sacred than these few years of human life, — an eternal, undying soul, given

into your hands to be required again at the judgment day. God will ask how you have dealt with that. And all these minor things help to make or mar. If you could only see the grave importance of this."

"I think I have since last night," was the faltering answer. "God helping me, I do mean to try."

The boyish voice was very earnest and solemn.

"I think you have suffered enough, Rob, without any further reproach, and perhaps just now I am too thoroughly thankful for your deliverance to utter one severe word. Only, you see, that, if I sometimes abridge your pleasures, it is that I may save you much pain in the end. Believe this."

"I do. I shall."

"And I ask you to trust me until your own judgment has matured. You will feel so differently when you really do arrive at manhood. I want, if I can, to bridge over all your dangerous places."

Rob clung closer to his uncle. He seemed dimly to understand the great love, the unwearied patience, and the watchful care.

"God keep me from ever trying it so sorely again," he prayed fervently, under his breath.

When they returned, Uncle Robert went directly



to the parlor. Kathie was lying on the sofa, with a slight headache, but the others were dispersed in various directions.

"My little darling," he said, tenderly, "I have just heard how God gave you back to us out of the great deep."

"O Uncle Robert, I want to tell you my story. I was n't half as brave and strong as I should have been. I ought not have gone at all, and then they might have given it up. So it was n't near all Rob's fault, and I want you to be good and tender to him, for he suffered terribly. You may punish me instead."

The soft arms were round his neck, and the little wet cheek was pressed close to his.

"I think you did forget orders just a wee bit, Kathie. But the best of us get out of step sometimes. I can't scold because I am so glad to have you safe, and I fancy that you will be sure to remember another time. I do believe Rob has learned a lesson that he will never forget."

"Dear Rob," she murmured softly. "Shall you let him go to New York now?"

"He very generously offered to give it up."

"I wish you would deprive me of something, instead," she said, earnestly.

"I think he has suffered enough without any further punishment. I mean to have him go, and just put him upon his honor. It will be the very best thing that could happen to him."

So Kathie was satisfied. There was not much talking about the accident, for it seemed so terrible to them, but they all admitted that Laura had behaved with a great deal of bravery and coolness.

Rob was quite unwilling to take the promised pleasure at first, but his uncle insisted. On Tuesday of the following week the Mackenzies packed and made ready, as they were to start early in the morning. Rob put in a few necessary articles; the rest were to go direct to Cedarwood. They were all up to see them off. Kathie was as fresh as a rose, and had recovered her spirits entirely.

Aunt Ruth and the General lingered a little behind. The old girlish bloom and sweetness seemed to have come back to her face. Even Kathie thought it transfigured her, and seemed lost as to its strange, new meaning.

Bruce went up to her and held her hand a moment,

looking earnestly into her eyes. She bent nearer and kissed him, and then Kathie understood in a moment how it was.

"O, you won't mind," Bruce exclaimed, in a husky, excited tone, that showed how deeply his heart was touched. "You have so many to love you. And I have never had a mother since I could remember, nor a home, and she is so sweet. You will let me have a little bit of her."

"Yes," Kathie said, gravely; but somehow the tears came into her eyes.

"And you will actually be my cousin! Rob too!"

Rob was taking it all in as well, but a queer thought tugged at his heart. The boys at school considered step-mothers an abomination. Suppose Bruce — but he did not and would not. The loyal face was a true index to a loyal heart. Aunt Ruth would n't be an old maid —

With that he kissed her rapturously. "Good by" said everybody, and the stage started.

They were quiet enough afterward. Emma finished her sketches, Kathie sewed, and the one or two remaining tea-parties lost their charm.

Mrs. Alston decided to go on Friday. The Mere-

diths were to remain a week or two longer, until they were too lonesome, Jessie said. So there was another packing, and Uncle Robert told the girls they would have to charter a sloop to take their curiosities home.

Everybody was very sorry to have them go, and wanted them to be sure and come again next summer. Letty Green told Kathie privately that she thought Rob the most splendid boy that could possibly be. Miss Wealthy sniffed and wiped her eyes, and said something about lacerated hearts and sweet companionship relentlessly severed by the iron hand of fate.

"You will see us trotting home next week as meek as two lambs in search of new pasture," said Mr. Meredith, laughingly.

Dear Cedarwood! It was the sweetest and prettiest spot in the whole world, after all. There was Fred as rosy as an apple, and almost as round, Hannah and Jane delighted to see them, and all the cosey rooms with a home fragrance in the very atmosphere.

"It is good to go away just for the pleasure of coming home," Kathie said, exultantly.

They kept Emma one night. She expressed her

obligations in the most heartfelt and graceful manner, though she declared that she could never do anything in return.

"Then you must do it for some one else," Aunt Ruth said, quietly. "It is the best way to pay back pleasures. It is like putting money in circulation and keeping it there, and after a while nearly every one gets a little."

Mr. Langdon had left the day before Kathie's accident, but he had heard it from Mrs. Adams, and came in to see if her prolonged bath "had changed her into a mermaid," he said, laughingly.

There was all the excitement of getting settled again, of calling on old friends as soon as they returned. Then Rob's visit was finished and he came back. Mr. and Mrs. Meredith came home, Charlie Darrell returned from Central New York, where he had been visiting uncles and aunts and cousins; and suddenly school became the engrossing topic.

Rob's stay in New York had been a complete success. One or two temptations he had combated very decisively, gaining strength from his late resolves and the earnest desire for guidance.

One of these had been an invitation to take wine

at a small dinner-party. His first feeling had been the old one, — what great harm can there be in it? But he honestly admitted to himself that he would not be likely to take it in Uncle Robert's presence, so he would not here.

"But do you think it so very wrong?" he asked of Bruce afterward. "Nearly all gentlemen do drink a little."

"I promised father that I would not touch a drop until I was past twenty-one. I never broke a promise to him in my life."

Rob colored, but felt the braver for his own effort, though restrained by no especial bond.

He and Uncle Robert had a long talk the evening before he went to school. There was a slow and gracious change coming over him. Less confident in his own beliefs, he seemed to consider the way before him more seriously than hitherto.

But the parting gave his heart a great wrench. He had never loved his mother and Kathie half so well, he thought; and the long weeks and months of separation looked formidable.

"You will remember," his uncle said, softly.

"That I am in the ranks! Dear Uncle Robert,

pray that I may be a faithful soldier to my life's end"; and Rob turned away his face, that no one might see the tears.

O bright young soldier, the warfare is but just begun, and the deserters are many! God grant that you may be found loyal and brave, and forevermore true to your colors; for the way is long and temptations are on every hand, but to him that overcometh is promised not mere worldly honors, but a crown and life everlasting! God grant that there may be no uncertain steps, but a steady tramp, tramp, until you reach the portals of the land afar, where the King sits in his glory!

THE END.

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